PROGRESS OF THE SOUL

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FOREWORD

It is never an easy matter to maintain the balance of our spiritual life. We err either by unduly developing the active side of it, or the contemplative. Whereas it is never a truly healthful life unless these two aspects are kept in relative proportion. To-day the swing of the pendulum is towards the outward. Men show less disposition to look within, and more to interest themselves in the lives of others, in the service of humanity. They are eager to respond to the calls of Christian enterprise, to engage in a fussy philanthropy, or to busy themselves in a round of religious engagements. The inner life is left to take care of itself. In these pages an attempt is made to redress the balance, by emphasising the necessity of devotion, and a close walk with God. Not that we would have less activity, but activity going hand in hand with soul-culture, with deep-seated piety, with communion, and a constant abiding in Christ. Not that we would have less care bestowed on that part of our life which is visible to men, but more on that part of it which

is known to Him who seeth in secret. The most restless activity will accomplish little unless it is sustained and vitalised by a vigorous life within. It will prove but a poor satisfaction to us, if, after all our feverish exertions in the service of society, we have to make the mournful confession, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." "Take heed to thyself," was the charge of a great apostle. It is well to be diligent; it is well to have influence; but it is better to be right with God. It is well to improve society, but let us not forget to improve ourselves. It is well to go out into the wide field of the world and sow the good seed of the kingdom as extensively as we can, but there is a little plot of ground within our own being which we must not suffer to become like "the field of the slothful," or the sluggard's farm. The statement of the Rev. G. H. Knight, the author of "In the Secret of His Presence," is very much to the point: "The great difficulty in earlier times used to be to get men to be earnest enough to go *into* the world and sanctify *it*. Now the difficulty is to get them to be earnest enough to go *away* from the world and sanctify *themselves*."

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PROGRESS OF THE SOUL

CHAPTER I

THE INNER LIFE

"The truly religious life is always a secret life."—ALEX. WHYTE.

"Many men seem perfect strangers to their own characters."—BISHOP BUTLER.

"The empire of a man's life lies within him, and not outside of him."—BEECHER.

IN these crowded days, when little margin is left after the claims of business and pleasure have been satisfied, we need to be reminded that the inner life is the true life. Our thought-world is our real world. The story of any human life is not really told if we confine ourselves to a recital of the outward happenings and surface activities which have marked its course, such as might furnish materials to a biographer. When the incidents of a man's career have been duly chronicled, when mention has been made of his achievements, when his honours and distinctions have all been enumerated, when the products of his brain and the extent of his possessions have

been set forth, we are still far from any acquaintance with the man as he really was. We have yet to inquire *within*. We have to explore the realm of mind and soul. We have to penetrate into the region of the unpublished, unrecorded self where life is at once made and felt. What events have been transpiring *there?* What thoughts and feelings have been passing there? What sentiments live and revel? Of what moral quality are the desires, the aims, the resolves, the aspirations? What are the turns and windings of experience, the alternations of joy and fear? In a word, what is the scenery of that inner landscape, and what lights and shadows play upon it? There is a biography of the *mind*. There are memoirs of the *soul*. "The real epochs of our life," says Mr. Emerson, "are not in the visible facts of our choice of a calling, our marriage, our acquisition of an office and the like, but in a silent thought by the wayside as we walk, in a thought which revises our entire manner of life, and says, 'Thus hast thou done, but it were better thus.'" The decisive determinations of life, its critical turning-points, its revised estimates, are all in these silent moments. Indeed, as some one has wisely said, it is always a great step in the interpretation of life when we have discovered that all events are ultimately

spiritual. In that discovery the true interest and significance of life are to be looked for. The most interesting lives even of Christ Himself are not those which recount the details of His outer ministry, not those which "know Christ after the flesh" and trace His movements in Galilee and Judea, but those which seek to disclose to us "the *mind* of Christ," and let us see into "the travail of His *soul*."

Jesus Christ Himself laid special emphasis on the *inwardness* of the true life. He placed its seat and centre in that innermost sanctuary of consciousness where thought and feeling and resolve take their origin. "Behold," He said, "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 21). "Within you"—affecting your spirits, not your outward circumstances, coming not as a startling phenomenon which you must strain your eyes with curiosity to see, but as a silent leaven working in heart and conscience. The true spiritual life must have as its centre and starting-point the individual and private heart, however far afield its influence may travel, and whatever wider conquests it may make. It is there the holy and divine must be established and maintained. It is there we must strive for and win the excellence we love.

To the same effect was that word of His

addressed to the woman of Samaria: "The water that I shall give him shall be *in him* a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14). That is the place for a man to have religion—"*in him*," enlarging his thoughts, purifying his motives, satisfying his cravings, supplying his soul-wants, and making him what in and of himself he never else could be. And in the same connection we recall that other saying: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke vi. 45). There is a treasury of the heart, and words and actions are but coins minted in and issued from it. The heart is a vessel whose contents flow forth into the life—inky streams, or pure as crystal, as the case may be. True religion is a "treasure" in the heart of the man who has it, enriching him, and putting it in his power to enrich others, by bringing forth his own stock of good and distributing it for their benefit. What such a man will do and say agrees with what is uppermost in his heart, for "out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." It concerns us, therefore, to look well to the heart as the seat

of character. "Keep the heart with all diligence," says the wise man; be careful what enters it, and what it is filled with; keep watch and ward over its gateways, remembering that "out of *it* are the issues of life."

In continuance of the Master's teaching the apostles also are equally careful to accentuate the importance of the inner life. The Apostle Peter speaks of the "hidden man of the heart," whose adornment, he says, are the graces and virtues of the Holy Spirit which beautify the human soul (1 Pet. iii. 4). The Christian's chief care should be the right ordering and cultivating of that man within the man. Much of the attention lavished so freely on the pampering and adornment of the outer man might be expended to better advantage on "*the hidden man of the heart.*" What is being done for *that* man? How fares it with *him?* How is *he* being supported? What education is *he* receiving? With what jewels is *he* being decorated to make him lovely in the sight of God, and amiable in the eyes of men? How much care and culture are expended upon *him?* Or is he suffered to run wild? Is he left unkempt and neglected, pinched and unclothed, untutored and undisciplined?

In 2 Corinthians iv. 16 the Apostle Paul

speaks of an "inward man" which is "renewed day by day" while the "outward man" perishes. The bodily life grows decrepit and totters to its end, but the inner life thrives. Grace flourishes amid the decays of nature. The poor clay tenement becomes dilapidated and crumbles away, but the inhabitant within, fetching in new supplies, is "renewed day by day," and continues bright and vigorous. This daily renewal of the inward man is what the godly have most reason to be solicitous about, that the work of grace within may be carried forward, so that as they are growing older they may also be growing better.

The same apostle makes reference to a "life" that is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). The life of the saint is a secret life. The veil of a gracious concealment rests upon it. It has no onlooker but God. Worldlings scarce know that it is there. What is more, they cannot comprehend or appreciate it: it would be lost labour for the saint to try to initiate them into its mysteries except through the same experience by which he was introduced to them himself. The spiritual man has experiences unknown to any but spiritual men. On an unseen battlefield he carries on a warfare with none but God to see. He has joys and sorrows with which a

stranger intermeddleth not. Under a commonplace exterior it may be there are concealed recesses into which the sun of publicity never shines, and of which only passing glimpses are caught at the rarest opportunity. Not seldom such a man has ordeals to pass through in his own bosom in which he is as lonely as Moses when he climbed to the top of Nebo. Living a life hid with God he partakes of "the hidden manna." He has meat to eat that the world knows not of. An open and manifest life we all lead in the eye of the world. But how many of us lead a *hidden* life? We all have an outward history. Have we also an *inner* one? The saintly Tholuck draws attention to the sadness of it when a Christian, who, after a long period of absence again meeting with his friend, can only give him an account of that history of his life which has taken place before the eyes of the world, but has nothing to relate of the history of a life *hid* with Christ in God. How many of us would find ourselves in that position when meeting our friends again after long intervals? Ever so much to tell of external occurrences, but little of the events that transpire *within*, of frames of mind and fluctuations of experience, of growth and expansion, of inward conflict and inward peace.

It is the region of this inner life we propose to explore in the following chapters. We have each one of us within our own breast a little kingdom more difficult to govern and administer than the Roman Empire itself. The management of the character, the correction of evil habits, the suppression of wrong desires, the cultivation of new virtues, the tutoring of the conscience, the maintenance of proper aims, the lonely struggle after better things, the bringing of the thoughts into captivity to Christ, the establishment of the reign of grace within —these are some of its problems. They are problems we have to face alone. They imply a work which is strictly individual, and entail responsibilities in which there can be no partnership. Our reliance must be on God only. It is in the management of the inner life that the viewless battle of the soul is lost or won. It is here that we achieve the supreme conquests, and reap of the Spirit life everlasting. So "call in your heart," as said the saintly Leighton, "commune oftener with yourself and God, be less abroad and more *within*, more above. *It is by far the sweetest life.*"

CHAPTER II

ITS BEGINNINGS

"Personal entrance into the Kingdom of God is not a fruit of the natural development of the good within us, but of a spiritual process of renewal which must be experienced within."—VAN OOSTERZEE.

"The great religious systems of the world have been founded upon the conviction that man must be changed."—AUSTIN PHELPS.

"*Christian:* Where shall we begin?
Hopeful: Where God began with us."—BUNYAN.

THE daughter of Dr. Duncan, of Edinburgh, having once told her father on a certain Sabbath that she had heard an excellent sermon on the text "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," Dr. Duncan immediately asked, "Did it begin with regeneration?" That inquiry went to the root of the matter. It is quite as essential that the Christian life should begin with regeneration as that a good sermon on sanctification should begin with it. The new birth is the starting-point of all that is spiritual and holy. It is a deep initial experience which cannot be omitted, or skipped, or minimised, or slurred

over. In that classical chapter on the subject in John's Gospel, in which, as Dr. Alexander Whyte says, " the Evangelist introduces us into what we would call an inquiry room, with our Lord as the Director and Counsellor of souls, and Nicodemus as the inquirer," our Lord lays it down as an absolute rule that except a man be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God, nor even see it. Its gates are closed against him. Or, rather, he himself is his own barrier, for even were he permitted to enter, he would find no relish in the joys and exercises of the Kingdom, inasmuch as he would be lacking in the capacity for appreciating the felicities and employments of holy minds. As well expect a blind man to enjoy the beauties of some lovely landscape, or a deaf man the music of an oratorio, as an unspiritual man the pleasures and delights of a spiritual heaven.

We enter on the new life, then, as we do on the natural life, by a *birth*. We do not come into it by any acts or practices, by any strivings or self-exertions. It is well to reform ourselves, to " cure ourselves of our faults," as the phrase is, to give up our evil habits, to correct irregularities of temper and desire. The more of this the better, but when we have issued a new and improved edition of ourselves, when we have

even gilded ourselves with a varnish of culture and refinement, we are still far short of that second birth which is the only door into the Kingdom. What we need is, not to be reformed, but to be "transformed by the renewing of our mind." An old writer says, "If Christ and the Holy Spirit take us not in hand, all else is but a palliative." Nor will mere *education* suffice. Education is only the bringing out of what is already in us, but the contents of our nature are such as to call for a more radical change than any which education can effect. Mr. Herbert Spencer announces a great truth when he declares that "we never can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts." By no species of alchemy known to us can we bring the graces and virtues of the Christian life out of the native instincts and resources of the human heart. The fruits of the Spirit are not grown on the stem of nature. Equally to be guarded against is the modern notion so commonly met with that we glide into the new life by a process of natural evolution. If the good things are first planted in us, they may no doubt develop into glorious perfection, but they need to be planted first. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and by no lapse of time, nor by any happy accident, will it ever evolve into "that which

is born of the Spirit." The natural will never pass into the supernatural. Between these two there is a great gulf fixed which only Divine intervention can bridge. Pride does not evolve into humility, nor selfishness into charity, nor carnality into spiritual-mindedness, nor morality into holiness. Saul of Tarsus did not evolve into Paul the apostle. Paul's own account of it is something very different: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. v. 17). "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. ii. 10). Peter did not evolve along any lines of gradual development into Cephas, the rocklike man on whom Christ built His Church, and to whom He handed the keys of His Kingdom. Peter himself says the change was brought about far otherwise: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. i. 23). John did not evolve into the apostle of love. He is careful to explain that the larger, nobler life to which he attained was the result of Divine action on the soul, effecting a wondrous change: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God" (1 John ii. 29). "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 John iii. 9). "But as many as received

Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12—13). If we allow the saints to speak for themselves, they all testify to the fact that all their saintliness originated in a gracious change of heart wrought by the Spirit of God, implanting a new life, issuing in new character and new conduct.

Regeneration, then, goes a thousand miles deeper than any or all of the proposed substitutes for it to which reference has been made. The change is radical, marvellous, Divine. It is the creation within us of a new nature, the impartation of a new life, far beyond that which belongs to us as born after the flesh, the beginning of a new experience, involving new feelings, new aims, new hopes, new tastes, the introduction to a new world, the starting us on a new road. There is in every man behind all words and deeds a governing principle, a reigning impulse, which is the inner source of conduct and character; it is *this* which is changed in regeneration, and on this change salvation depends. It is a "making the tree good," that the fruit it produces may be "good." "The Scriptures," says Dr. Bushnell, "never speak of this change in

terms of improvement or growing better on the plane of the old character, but on the contrary in bold and sweeping contrasts." They describe it as a new creation in Christ, a rebirth, a resurrection, a putting off of the old man and a putting on of the new, a passing from death unto life. Modern theories of this great central experience, like those of Starbuck, President Hall, and Professor James, are disqualified as falling far short of New Testament requirements. To say that "youth takes to religion at the period of adolescence as its natural element," that "true conversion is as natural as the blossoming of a flower," that "conversion is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon, incidental to the child's passage from its small universe to the wider intellectual and spiritual life of maturity," or that it arises from experiences accumulated in the subliminal region of mentality suddenly invading and breaking into the consciousness, is to empty the whole experience of its Divine and supernatural character. It is a dragging of it down to the plane of the human, to the level of the natural. Jesus was never more decided in His teaching than when He declared that we must be "born *of God*," "born *from above*." Such expressions as these surely imply that conversion demands a Divine agency for its

accomplishment, and that influences of a heavenly origin and character are at work above and beyond any that belong to unaided flesh and blood.

This change of the new birth can only come to us through the redemptive mission and work of Christ. At a later stage of His conversation with Nicodemus this side of the truth is strongly insisted on by our Lord. What the soul needs and what it receives in regeneration is the communication of a new life, but that life can only come to it through the sacrifice of the world's Redeemer for the world's sin: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 14—15). The one great obstacle to newness of life and fellowship with God is sin, and that sin might be put away, the Sinless One must go up to the Cross, and die a death of sacrifice as the spotless victim for a world's offences. The Son of Man "lifted up" in the darkness and eclipse of the Crucifixion is God's remedy for sin. With His stripes we are healed. Just as the snake-bitten Israelite was cured of his pain, and saved from certain death, by looking to the serpent of brass uplifted on a pole in the midst of the death-

stricken camp, so healing and life come to the dying sinner by looking to the great antidote of sin—Christ lifted on the Tree, shedding the blood that propitiates and cleanses. There is life in a look; the death sentence is reversed; the poison of sin is counteracted in the soul, its deadly malady arrested, and it becomes the recipient of eternal life. To this end a saving connection with Christ must be established by faith in His name. "Whosoever *believeth on Him* shall have everlasting life." To believe in Christ is not only to give a cordial assent to all that is told us of Him in the gospel, but to trust Him to do for us all that He says He will do and to be to us all that He says He will be, to cast ourselves in humble reliance upon His doing and His dying, to rest upon Him our soul's burden and destiny. The very simplicity of faith renders laboured explanations of it unnecessary. "They who know what is meant by *faith* in a *promise* know what is meant by *faith* in the *gospel;* they who know what is meant by *faith* in a *remedy* know what is meant by *faith in the blood of the Redeemer;* they who know what is meant by *faith in a physician, faith in an advocate, faith in a friend*, know too what the Scriptures mean to express when they speak of *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Whoever

so believes has already begun in him that eternal life which is developed in sanctification, and will one day be consummated in the blessedness of the heavenly land. And here we need not be detained by any artificial questions of priority or sequence as debating whether Christ or the Spirit comes first, faith or the newborn life. Perhaps it is nearest the truth to say that the two are simultaneous and inseparable. Right relations with God, and the soul's being made right in its own moral nature, are both parts in the one great change. Reconciliation and regeneration go together. Christ Himself treats them as one. No reader of the New Testament can fail to notice that regeneration is never contemplated apart from Christ. "If any man be *in Christ* he is a new creature" (2 Cor. v. 17). "Ye are all the children of God by *faith in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. iii. 26). "As many as *received* Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe in His name:* which were *born* not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12—13).

While the soul's entrance on the new life will in every case possess certain features in common, and will always exhibit a general conformity to the conditions laid down in Scrip-

ture, we must avoid the mistake of supposing that it can all be reduced to any uniform or stereotyped pattern. There is no fixed plan to which its history and progress can be referred. There is no one unvarying path which in every instance the soul must be summoned to tread. Henry Drummond's word of caution is extremely pertinent : " Conversion does not always develop like a proposition in Euclid, or a sensitised plate in photography. It is not God's will that there should only be a few stereotyped forms of saints—the Richard Baxter type, the Jeremy Taylor type, the Philip Doddridge type." In the conversion of those who have been brought up in a Christian home, familiar with Christian teaching, and inhaling an atmosphere of religion, we cannot expect the decided transformation that we should look for in the case of those who have to break with a wrongful past and start on an altogether new line. The criminal retracing his steps from his dark and tortuous ways ; the prodigal returning home from the far country ; a persecuting Saul stopped on his Damascus road, will present a type of conversion more or less abrupt, explosive, demonstrative. As unlike as it well can be from this marked and violent transition is the case of the youth of pure mind, religiously brought up, and steadied by Christian

culture, who glides into the new life in a manner quiet and subdued, almost without observation. Not only so, large allowance must be made for the diversity of the Spirit's workings, for the immense circle of freedom in which the Divine love moves in its approach to the human soul, and for the many guises Christ may assume in seeking that which is lost. We must not particularise too much, nor expect to have everything done and felt by rule as under the guidance of an official director. Care must be taken, moreover, not to cumber the path of the inquirer by associating with conversion limitations, morbidities, and prejudices, which, though often its accidental accompaniments, are not to be regarded of its essence. It is not at all necessary in coming to Christ to have strange emotions, to experience terrible alarms, to be plunged in deep despair, or to pass through a weary interval of darkness and distress. There is a measure of truth in the remark that "many have taken Bunyan's hypochondriacs as a kind of strait gate for themselves." Each man must pass through this great experience in his own fashion, but no one man is to map out the route which all other travellers are to follow. It is not even necessary to lie outside the harbour of mercy for a period of painful quarantine, tossed with doubts and

fears, before we find a peaceful anchorage in Christ. Dr. Pierson tells the story of a little child who had found salvation by the short and simple method of faith in Christ, and was warned by an old man, who had only found his way to the Cross after long despairing struggles, that perhaps her way was too easy. "Why," said he, "you do not seem to have been through the Slough of Despond!" To which the child only replied: "Please, sir, I did not come that way." Nor need any of us come that way, if we will only follow the plain directions of the Word. It is written in the Gospels, "They came to Him from every quarter" (Mark i. 47), and we may well understand the words to mean not only that they came to Him from every quarter geographically, but that they came to Him from every mental condition, from every form of feeling and experience, from every cast of constitution, and from every type of temperament.

The beginnings of the interior life are frequently small and obscure. It is not easy to trace the origin of the early manifestations of grace, nor to relate their history. The thoughts and feelings that lead us to Christ are often such as excite little notice, possessing none of that glare and sensation which those who crave for signs and wonders might expect. They take forms which

are scarcely perceptible—the first checks of conscience, the first serious thought, the first desire after better things, the first faint belief, the first trembling hope, the first feeble resolve. These not seldom exist in the soul as smouldering flax, or the dimly-burning wick. There is a little life, a little faith, a little strength. It is the day of small things, which, however, we must remember, is nevertheless a day of precious things, and may yet become a day of great things. Matthew Henry, the commentator, when a boy of ten heard a sermon at Broad Oak from his own father on "The Grain of Mustard Seed," and said to his sister afterwards: "I think I have got a grain of grace in my heart to-day which may afterwards come to something." The saintly life that followed, the long and useful ministry at Chester, and the famous Commentary on the Bible with which his name is immortally associated, were all potentially in that "grain of grace" let fall into the child's heart that day, which, though indeed the least of all seeds, sprang into a veritable tree of life, under whose shadow many were to find shelter and refreshment. It was a small beginning, but the youth was conscious that it did begin. Multitudes, however, cannot tell when they were first converted, can give no account of the attendant

circumstances, and for this reason are foolish enough to doubt whether they were converted at all. Their conversion does not happen to have been dramatic or sensational, like that of the Philippian gaoler, but they were called of God by a still small voice, as was Lydia, the Lord gently opening their hearts to the incoming of Divine truth and heavenly influence. Let all such be encouraged. It is not necessary to know when we were converted; it is only necessary to be assured that we are so. There may be no red-letter day marked in our calendar as the day when we first entered the fold of Christ; it is sufficient to know that we are *there*, safe within its sacred enclosure. We may not be able to tell the exact moment at which the sun rose this morning, but we can have no doubt that he is risen. We cannot tell as we walk along the beach the exact minute that the tide commenced to turn, but if we come back an hour later we shall have no difficulty in concluding that it has turned. Despite our ignorance of what transpired on any particular day in a past now lying far behind us, if *this* day we are exercising faith in Christ, and are in conscious union with Him, we may know assuredly that we are this day forgiven and accepted. Dr. Spencer, in his "Pastor's Sketches," tells of

a farmer and his wife whose one great trouble was that if they had any religion they wanted to know when it *began.* Dr. Spencer said to the husband: "Can you tell me when your corn *begins* to grow, or when your wheat *begins* to come up?" And turning to the wife he asked: "Can you tell me when those beautiful violets and pinks under your window *began* to come up?" They smiled, and a new intelligence lit up their faces. Said the farmer, after a thoughtful pause: "I know my corn *has* come up, and my wheat *does* grow."

But if we happen to belong to those who definitely know the date of their conversion it is the most memorable date in all our history. It is a day "to be observed unto the Lord"; it is "the beginning of months" to us—the day when for the first time we were able to say:

> "'Tis done, the great transaction's done;
> I am the Lord's and He is mine,"

the day when the soul crossed its Rubicon. From that day everything good in us is to be dated. The new creature may well have a new chronology. And should we happen to know the place, it is a place worthy to be railed in from all other places and visited as a sacred shrine. It must ever be to us "the Mecca and Palestine" of the soul, to which

our thoughts travel in grateful pilgrimage. We shall retain the image of it in our death-hour. We shall remember it in the skies. It cannot be less sacred to us than the hill Mizar to David, or the Damascus road to Paul, the fig tree to Nathanael, the toll-booth to Matthew, or the well of Sychar to the woman of Samaria.

John Bunyan says it is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the very beginnings of grace with their souls, and reminds us how accustomed Paul was to recount the story of his conversion even before his judges when on trial for his life. And truly when we consider what this great and happy change means, and the vastness of the blessings and privileges to which it introduces us, we cannot wonder that the thoughts will often revert to it. It is the beginning of all that is good and godlike in the soul. It starts us on a virtuous career. It makes us the friends of God, joint heirs with Christ, and destined inhabitants of heaven. It ushers us into a new world, makes all things wear an altered look, and opens up for us a future of untold possibilities. We feel as if in comparison our past life was but a barren interlude not worth recording. The biographer of Cyprian passes by the early period of his history entirely with the remark that a man's actions should be

recorded not from the time of his *first*, but of his *second*, birth. Is not that mode of reckoning the right one? That portion of our life which had no spiritual experience or purpose in it we feel to have been lost. It is not blessed in the retrospect. During that time, void of value and significance, we have only existed. Only now have we begun to *live*. "All else is Being flung awav."

CHAPTER III

ITS GROWTH

"Forgiveness is not the re-establishment of health, it is but the crisis of convalescence."—GODET.

"Growth in grace is to be cared for by you above all things."—RUTHERFORD'S Letter to John Fleming.

"It is astonishing to see how little the generality of professing Christians grow in grace. I have no doubt that if they would do as they might, and give the attention to it they ought, they might grow more in six months than they do now in all their lives."—CHARLES J. FINNEY.

WE must not stop at conversion. Many people, even Christian people, fall into the fatal mistake of supposing that, once soundly converted, all is finished and done with, and henceforth they live on the remembrance of a bygone experience as on hoarded manna. The truth is, in conversion we have only taken the first step—a most momentous step no doubt—but still only a step in a process which is to go on as long as life itself, and which stretches into the eternity beyond. A new life has been imparted, but that life has to undergo development and expansion. The seed has been planted, but it has yet

to be tended and cared for till it grows into a tree of righteousness. The light has been kindled, but it has yet to shine with increasing radiance unto the perfect day. The great change makes the sinner a child of God, but long years may pass before he attains to the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. The whole work of gospel sanctification thus lies ahead of us, to be followed up with many a struggle, and not without painful fluctuations and continual delays. Hence, as someone has well said, "'Grow in grace' is the Christian's lifelong order."

Perhaps the saddest feature in many Christian lives to-day is the apparent failure to realise the necessity for growth. The very idea of progress seems to have faded out of sight. Such little headway has been made. They are no further on than they were years ago—no steadily increasing deliverance from evil, no steadily increasing appropriation of the good. They seem to be instances of arrested development. Or, if they have had brief spasms of progress, these have been separated by long, dreary intervals of stoppage and suspended animation. They have only to ask themselves, Is my temper any better than it was ten or twenty years ago? Have I more command over myself? Are my habits improved? Is Christ more precious? Is

my walk with God any closer? Am I any nearer Heaven? If honest answers are returned to such self-examination, they cannot but lead to the mournful discovery that in a multitude of cases the Christian life, instead of being healthily progressive, has been stagnant and stationary. And it is the most melancholy of all illusions when we imagine that to regret our not advancing serves as a kind of substitute and reparation for our want of progress. It is not enough to say to God daily, with a sorrow which daily tends to grow weaker: "My God, I confess and deplore it, but I am the same to-day as I was yesterday, and am likely to be the same to-morrow as I am to-day." This, as Vinet points out, is but "to replace continuity of progress with continuity of regret," and he goes on to ask truly enough: "Is it not to such a sickly regret as this that the Christianity of many in our day may be reduced?"

All true growth in grace begins in *renunciation*. We have got promptly to reject and repudiate the relics of the sinful past. We are to cut connection with whatever savours of the former manner of life. There is to be no camping on the edges of old sins. The vicious elements are to be expurgated from the life. One of the foremost theologians of our time defines sanctification as "the process by which human nature

is set free from its unhallowed character." Even things not in themselves positively wrong, if their influence is not helpful, if we find them dangerous or likely to prove a snare, must go. The development of the Christian life, in its early stage, takes the form of unlearning, renouncing, purifying. " Put off concerning your former manner of life the old man, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness " (Eph. iv. 22—24). " Seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him " (Col. iii. 9—10). There is here a double duty enjoined upon us, an unclothing and a clothing upon, a denuding ourselves of the old, and an investing ourselves with the new. There must first be an undressing of the old garments of the flesh before we can be arrayed in the white raiment of the new life. The rags of the prodigal must be stripped from off him before the Father can say, " Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." The " putting off " process, which not seldom involves painful loss and sacrifice, is followed by the " putting on." Having renounced what is wrong, we have to acquire and cultivate what is virtuous. The ground having been cleared of weeds and thorns,

it is only that the fruits of righteousness may in due time make their appearance. New qualities are to be developed, and we have to address ourselves to the great business of "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." In a word, there yet lies before us the whole wide field of self-improvement, and the gradual changing of ourselves into better men.

The general injunction to "grow in grace" applies also to growth in particular graces. As one of our old divines puts it, "we are to strive after the graces we have not, and after more of the graces we have." To grow in grace is to grow in *faith*, and *hope*, and *love*. It is always open to us to believe more firmly, to hope more confidently, to love more fervently. To grow in grace is to grow in *consecration* till we can say, "To me to live is Christ"; to grow in *humility* till we can say with Paul, "I have not yet attained"; and in *contentment* till we can say with the same apostle, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." To grow in grace is to grow in everything that is truly good. Coleridge defined genius as "the faculty of growth." The same definition applies to goodness. We think of growth in grace as growth in clearness of insight, in freedom from self, in control of the temper, in government of

the tongue, in the right use of time, in readiness to forgive injuries, and in the spirit of forbearance.

> " I asked the Lord that I might grow
> In faith and love and every grace,
> Might more of His salvation know,
> And seek more earnestly His face."

How much growth in grace ought to be cared for, and how urgent we should be in the pursuit of it, may be inferred from such considerations as these :—

1. Growth is the *test of life.* A pebble cast into the soil does not grow, but the tiniest seedling will. A paling post stuck into the ground does not grow, but the smallest sapling will. Painted flowers, or flowers in wax, are very different from those blooming in the garden. If there be no movement or progress in our Christian life, we may gravely suspect it is because the life is not there to begin with. If it was, there would be a steady tendency to germinate, to blossom, and to mature, so that the story of its development would conform to our Lord's own words— " first the blade, then the ear, and afterwards the full corn in the ear."

2. Growth is the *sign of health* If a child should suddenly cease growing, it would imply something terribly wrong. To the inexpressible anguish of its parents, such a stunted child

becomes a dwarf, or a monstrosity. Mr. Spurgeon used to tell how he had the photographs of his boys taken on every birthday year after year till they grew up, so that he could see at a glance their gradual development from babyhood to youth. And then he would ask his hearers to suppose that such photographic memorials of *their spiritual* life had been taken and preserved —would these indicate a regular advance, as in the case of the boys, or would they exhibit many of them as not yet past the perambulator stage? A Christian who does not grow is not in good spiritual health. There is something constitutionally abnormal and wrong.

3. Growth in the Christian life is *essential* to *usefulness*. A stunted unprogressive life is not likely to be influential on other lives. It does not impress the onlooker. It does not "adorn the doctrine." A life that has no advance in it is a life that does not *shine*, that does not *tell*, that does not *bless*. Such a life is not calculated to afford much light, or leading, or solacement, to its neighbours. Our usefulness will certainly be impaired, as life goes on, if with the passage of the years we are not becoming more fully devoted to God, and gathering that power and efficiency which fit us for more effectual service of our generation.

4. Growth of the soul is the one pursuit that *gives an interest and flavour to life*, on to its last day. He who follows it will not grow pessimistic with the years, nor sink into a despairing old age. It is the secret of a bright and victorious career. It brings enjoyment into the life from sources which the world cannot dry up.

5. Growth in grace is the *best preservative against falling*. The Apostle Peter closes his Second Epistle with a word of caution: "Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." And what does the apostle suggest as the most effective guarantee against such falling? It is indicated in the words that follow in the very next verse: "But *grow in grace* and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour." A full, rich, thriving, spiritual life is the best protection against things that threaten and tempt, just as vigorous health is the best security against the infection of disease. Fulness of vitality will do more to ensure our immunity from microbes and bacilli than any amount of disinfectants and sanitary precautions.

6. Growth in grace is essential to anything like *eminence in the Christian life*. We cannot

take out a good degree in the school of Christ if we are satisfied with present attainments, and never think of leaving the " first principles " and " going on unto perfection." Without such advance there can neither be any fair resemblance to the Master Himself, nor any real affinity with the saintly souls of all ages who have walked with Him in white, and whose most precious bequest to us is the shining example they have left us of what a human soul can grow to when its improvement has been made an object of absorbing pursuit.

We now turn to the question: What are the indications by which we may know whether we are growing in grace?

1. We may conclude that we are growing in grace if we are conscious of *increasing facility and delight in duty*. An eminent philosopher of our day has gone so far as to say that " the sense of duty is transitory and will diminish as fast as moralisation of character increases." The philosopher is mistaken. The sense of duty is permanent, and moral progress, instead of diminishing, accentuates the feeling of obligation. But what does happen is this—that as we grow in grace duty is liberated from its irksomeness, and from being a task becomes a pleasure and a delight. Obedience takes on alacrity and joy.

The feeling of constraint disappears from the life—unless it be the sweet compulsion of love. And so what Mr. Rendel Harris says comes true—that as we advance in the Christian life Jesus says to us, "My yoke is easy and *grows easier* every day, and my burden is light, and *grows lighter* with the passage of the years."

2. It is an evidence of progress in the Christian life if we find ourselves *stronger to resist temptation.* A young sapling may be uprooted by the hand of a child. But let it grow into a tree of the forest, and the storms which before would have been a terror to it, only make music among its branches. If, as life goes on, we are getting more rooted and grounded, so that we can better withstand the onset of evil, we may take it as a sure sign of spiritual growth. When the tempting opportunity meets with less susceptible disposition within; if, when the enticements of sin allure us, there is less readiness to consent, we may take it as an indication that we are gaining ground in our Christian life.

3. A *more stringent conscience* points in the same direction. It augurs well if we are more particular about the things of character and conduct than we used to be, if we feel the claims of rectitude to be more supreme, and are less

disposed to let down the standard a peg or two in accommodation to our weakness. It is itself no small advance in the divine life when conscience becomes more exact in its measurements, finer in its discriminations of right and wrong, and quicker in sounding the alarm at the most distant approaches of sin.

4. It is a mark of progress when we are *actuated more by settled principle than by feeling.* Young converts often experience an emotion and a glow that afterwards they seem to lose. But do they really lose it? Or is it only replaced by a calmer and more dispassionate state of soul, which is quite as genuine, and more to be desired? They will learn by-and-by that as the Christian life matures we come to have less passion and settle down into principle—that is to say, we act more from a sense of right. Whatever becomes of feeling, we are content to plod on in the path of obedience, constrained thereto by the simple knowledge that God requires it, and animated by a sense of duty. Sentiment has given place to habit, and ecstasy to law. "Red-hot religion," says a modern preacher, "has its place and value, but white-hot religion, the silent intense force which acts without sparks, smoke, or noise, is a diviner thing." Beginners in the Christian life often make themselves

unhappy by thinking that they fail in love to Christ, because the love does not flame in the consciousness, because it is not always in the life, or even in the thought. But in time they discover their mistake, and come to understand that the love may be there though not demonstrative, silently operative all the while, and "if we are not always blazing with love," as Mr. Spurgeon puts it, "we have a good fire banked up within the soul."

5. We may always regard it as an evidence of decided advance in our religious life when we are conscious of a *growing relish for spiritual things*. "There is a salt in spiritual things," says Dr. John Owen, "whereby they are condited and made savoury to a renewed mind: though to others they are as the white of an egg that hath no taste or savour in it. In this relish lies the sweetness and satisfaction of spiritual life." Have we come to know the meaning of this "relish," and do we experience it increasingly? From being dry and sapless, have the things of religion come to be "savoury" to us? Have we *tasted* that the Lord is gracious, and felt the sweetness of the love of Christ? Have we an increasing appetite for the Word? Do we find the Sabbath a delight and the means of grace enjoyable? Do we like to read the most spiritual

books? Do we relish spiritual preaching? Can we detect in ourselves more of that "minding the things of the spirit" which the apostle assures us is life and peace? The things of the spirit are such as the favour of God, the welfare of the soul, the concerns of eternity. Does the mind revert to these things with growing pleasure and satisfaction, and are all its projects and contrivances more and more occupied with them?

6. It marks a great advance in Christian attainment when we come to have a *stronger assurance of salvation.* Perhaps the commonest cause of doubting and uncertainty is the smallness of the measure of grace present in the soul, and the weakness of it. It is so inconsiderable in amount, and so feeble in operation, that it is scarcely discernible. We believe so weakly, and love God so little, that we scarce can tell whether we believe and love at all. As Richard Baxter says, we are like a man in a swoon, whose pulse and breathing are so weak and obscure that it can hardly be perceived whether they are moving at all, and consequently whether the man be alive or dead. But as grace gains increase and strength in the soul it discovers itself more perceptibly and asserts its influence more vigorously, so that it can no longer be doubted

of, and we can no longer entertain any serious misgivings as to whether we are in a gracious state. Nothing breeds so much doubt and uncertainty as remaining sin. Consequently, as sin is subdued and eliminated from the nature, and the soul is more and more purged from its defilement, we are more assured of our acceptance, our evidences grow brighter, the peace of God streams into the mind, and we live under the shining of His countenance.

7. Growth in grace will invariably show itself in *more evangelical dependence on Christ.* James Fraser, of Brea, took it as a sure sign of increasing sanctification that he "now both lived and worked far more evangelically than he was wont to do"; and if we inquire what it was he meant by that, Fraser is ready with his explanation: "I learned to live less and less in and on myself, and more and more in and on Jesus Christ as made of God to me all my need. I less and less looked to any of my own experiences, or attainments, or feelings, but to Christ as made of God all that for me and to me, and not to Him as sensibly felt and fully possessed by me, but solely and always as offered to me in the Gospel." Can we discover in ourselves anything answering to this experience? Are we learning more and more what Christ is to the

soul, are we coming to be more proficient in the art of appropriating and applying Him, are we making more use of Him in the soul's daily exigencies, are we resting our salvation upon Him more absolutely, and do all our varied experiences and attainments, and feelings, even our very sinfulness, tend only to shut us up to Him? Then indeed may we be said to be growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.

8. It would be an excellent test of growth in grace if we singled out some one quality or faculty of our being and began to develop it for Christ. Or, if we fixed attention on some one fault or defect of character and set to to rectify it—our temper, our pride, our self-conceit. Or, suppose we took some one feature in the example of Christ and sought to copy and reproduce it in our own life. The same experiment might be made with some particular virtue, giving special care to its cultivation for a given period of time—say self-repression, simplicity, gentleness, constancy, considerateness, fidelity. Mr. Spurgeon advises Christians in navigating the sea of life to learn a lesson from the practice of sailors in using the log to test their pace and show what headway they are making. There are various ways, he says, by which we may

with readiness measure our progress ; our prayers, our labours, our patience, our faith, our humility, our communion with God, may each serve as a log with which to measure our sailing pace.

CHAPTER IV

ITS CONFLICTS

Who hath a greater combat than the man who laboureth to overcome himself ? "—THOMAS A KEMPIS.

" When the fight begins within himself
The man's worth something."—BROWNING.

" Let no man think that sudden in a minute
All is accomplished and the work is done—
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it
Scarce were it ended at thy setting sun."

THE growth of the Christian life is not destined to be an unimpeded advance. The effect of regeneration is to establish in the believer a new life at the centre of his manhood, and to dethrone the old sinful self. But the old self, though impaired in its power, is not destroyed. It still remains, and tries hard to regain its supremacy. And so the Christian life becomes henceforth an incessant warfare, of which the seventh chapter of Romans may be taken as the typical description. Plato used to say of each man that he was two men ; so may we with emphasis say of each Christian that he is two men in one,

or at least that there are within him two principles, or tendencies, contending for the mastery, thus giving rise to that perpetual discord and dualism in our nature which constitutes the tragedy of the soul. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 21—24). "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. v. 17). Here are two principles or impulses in irreconcilable antagonism contending for the dominion, each combating the other and seeking to dispossess it. In the little kingdom within the breast there is distraction and disturbance, for the passions and propensities of the old unsanctified self have come into conflict with the holy instincts and aspirings of the new nature. In this internal strife we have at once the sufficient reason and explanation of that irritation and distress felt so acutely, and at times agonisingly, by every soul undergoing the process of gospel sanctification. The struggle

varies in intensity, being much more severe in some than in others, but in the case of all it is a momentous one, full of passion and pathos, of tears and pity. It is a deadly duel, a lifelong encounter between the two principles, holiness and sin, grace and corruption, the carnal and the spiritual, a death grapple for the possession and control of the human soul, fierce as the contest waged by Satan and Michael the archangel over the body of Moses. Compared with this great spiritual combat the outward accessories of life dwindle into the merest trivialities, since the issues of this struggle will have a permanent and awful meaning when the shows and shadows of this transitory scene have all receded from our view. "Incomparably the greatest of all man's histories is the history of his fight with himself."

The nature and severity of the conflict may be inferred from that amazing bit of autobiography which is given us by Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans. He there raises the curtain and makes us spectators of what is going on within him. We see the travail of his interior life; the helpless consciousness of disharmony; the constant presence within him of evil propensity, hindering him in his attempts to do good and thwarting his strivings after holiness; the

terrible sense of inability to give effect to his good wishes and intentions; the bitter bondage into which sin often brought him till he seemed to be sold to some tyrant master whose behests he had to comply with though he did not share them; the frequent betrayal into the doing of things he hated to do, and which he felt to be contrary to the prevalent purpose of his heart and the general bent of his disposition. Hard pressed and weary of the struggle, his very intercession turns into a groan, and the apostle cries out in soul agony: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Baffled and exhausted, he looks round on the right hand and on the left for help, and, convinced that deliverance can come only from Christ and His grace, he faints back as it were into the arms of the Redeemer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Christ only can give him the victory. And so, as Bengel has it, "his miserable complaint ends in a hymn of thanks," for he sees deliverance in view. All which has its counterpart and fulfilment in every believing soul. It is our own experience writ in capitals. Speaking of the seventh chapter of Romans John Newton says: "Did you ever see my picture? I have it drawn by a masterly hand, and though another person sat for it, and one

whom I am far from resembling, it is as like me as one new guinea is like another. I had seen it a great many times before I could discern my own features in it, but then my eyes were very bad."

Why the dregs and remainders of sin should be left to rage even in the most saintly souls is one of the mysteries and griefs of the Christian life. It prompts the distressing question so often heard among the people of God: "Why am I thus?" "Why was not sin extirpated in me in the day of my regeneration? Why, where there is so much that is gracious and holy, should there have been permitted to remain so much also that is sinful, to be a source of harassment and contention every step of the way?" That which helps to give special interest and value to the seventh chapter of Romans is that it supplies an answer to this experimental and perplexing question. One of the most terrible chapters in all Scripture, it is also, paradoxical as it may seem, one of the most hopeful and consolatory. But for it the child of God would often be driven to despair.

1. God has made this to be *the appointed way of sanctification.* It is by means of this inner conflict that discipline, which is such an essential element in the Christian life, is attained;

it is by this that we are taught to war a good warfare ; it is by this that holiness is advanced. God's way of sanctifying us is not to save us from trouble and difficulty, but rather to put us upon going through trouble and difficulty, that the work of grace may be furthered in our hearts. It is this same inner conflict that provides at once the arena and the opportunity for what the apostle calls "working out our own salvation." So far as salvation is a work *for* us, it is already complete ; but so far as it is a work *in* us, it is ours to work it out, with this for our great incentive—"it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." The gracious principles God implants within us we are to "work out" into the life and conduct. We are expected to "work out" the image of Christ in the soul as the sculptor works out the statue from the block of marble in which it is already latent. Salvation is given us in *plan* or *sketch* as it were, and we are to "work out" the plan, and to fill in the sketch. Here is business enough to occupy us for a lifetime—"working out our own salvation" with the utmost effort and solicitude and the most energetic perseverance. It is of this *worked out* salvation that our sanctification consists. Indeed, as Principal Alexander

Whyte says, "our full salvation begins here, goes on here, and ends here." In this inner region, then, amid the deepest things of the soul, it will be our wisdom to labour more and more.

2. If we are distressed to find that our inner life resolves itself so much into a ceaseless conflict, it should comfort us not a little that *it is an experience we share in common with the most eminent of the saints.* If even such an one as Paul had an inward struggle so severe, we need not be surprised as though some strange thing happened unto us, if we who are so immeasurably behind him in grace should have a like warfare to wage, should often be compelled to make the same humbling confession, "when I would do good evil is present with me," or at times to join him in the cry of his extremity: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Passing through an experience so tragic and distressing, we are encouraged to know that he who was not a whit behind the chief of apostles passed through every phase of it before us. We feel very much like Christian as he walked disconsolate in the Valley of the Shadow when he heard on in front of him the voice of a man and gathered from thence that some were in the valley as well as

himself. We must not imagine we have lost our way because we are so incessantly vexed with the presence of indwelling sin. Rather it is a sign that we are following in the footsteps of the flock. It is part of the tribulation through which we must enter into the kingdom. There is not one of the white-robed multitude before the Throne who did not wrestle hard as we do now with inborn sin.

3. *The very fact of there being a conflict in the soul is itself a source of comfort.* We have reason to congratulate ourselves that sin has not all its own way, that there is the presence of grace to antagonise it. If we were dead in sin we should welcome it and not trouble about it; we should let it have free course, and make no stand against it. But our recalcitrance, our distress on account of it, our groanings and cries for deliverance, are all marks of spiritual life. We may rest assured that so long as the strong man armed keepeth the house of the soul he will keep it in peace; it is only when the stronger than he enters and seeks to dispossess him that there is conflict and disturbance. These "fightings within" are but indications that we are spiritually alive. When Christ was born all Jerusalem was troubled; so when Christ is born in any man the soul is in an uproar, for

all the hostile instincts of the old unregenerate self are at once awakened into opposition. Therefore, says an old Puritan divine, "It is no good sign to find all quiet within, and nothing at odds." There is a world of comfort as well as wisdom in those words of Rutherford: "Want of victory is not the mark of one that hath no grace, but the want of fighting is such a mark."

4. These sinful remainders survive in the regenerate to *give us a true sight and estimate of self.* Renovated though we be, and under grace, sin is left to fester and break out within us, that we may be cured of any tendency to self-exaltation, and make the humbling discovery of how intractable we are by nature, and how full of evil. John Newton says the fact of our own depravity is a truth which we never learn by being told it; when we are told it even by the Scriptures of truth we only half believe it, and so the Lord has to send us to the school of our own experience, that we may learn the bitter lesson thoroughly. By so doing He discovers to us the plague of the heart, forces us to know and acknowledge how full of selfishness we are even after all that grace has done for us, how much vanity still survives in us, how anger and revenge, envy and covetousness, yet lurk about the corners and crevices of the soul, what dark

patches there are within us, what weak points, what immaturities and imperfections, and how partial and intermittent is even the little goodness we possess. By these painful glimpses into what is going on within our own bosom, which at times make us shudder at ourselves, the Lord lays us in the dust, and brings home to us the conviction that it will take the blood of Jesus Christ to purify us, and all the influences of the Holy Spirit of God to sanctify us.

5. After the same manner we are *made to feel our entire dependence on Christ and His grace.* The weary warfare within with all the bondage and misery that attend it—is it not sufficiently explained and justified when we have said that it gives scope and opportunity for Christ to come in with His heavenly succours and reinforcements? Is it not worth while undergoing all the slips and faults, the stumblings and backslidings, rebellings and miscarriages, if in them the grace of God finds a platform on which to display its pardoning, redeeming, and saving power? It is by such dark and painful passages that we come to know what the grace of God can do for us, and how much it can make of us. Speaking of the will and the infirmity that clings to it, so that we cannot do many things that we would by reason of the malignity that is still in

the heart, Thomas Shepard, the New England Puritan, gives this advice: "Let a man get Christ to help him *here*." Yes, it is just *here* that Christ can help us most. And for what are these dregs of malignity still left in our nature, and for what has the will to encounter these obstructions and besetments in the exercise of its volitions, but that we may be driven to resort to Him for help, and stretch forth our hands toward Him for deliverance, as Paul did when, feeling himself to be a wretched man, he cried out: "I thank God through Jesus Christ, my Lord." In this way the whole process of our sanctification tends to exalt Christ, and to magnify the grace of God, so strikingly manifested in our upholding and overcoming.

6. The internal schism and discord in our nature *makes us willing to depart, and sets us longing for heaven.* "I believe," says John Newton, "nothing more habitually reconciles a child of God to the thought of death than the wearisomeness of this warfare. It makes us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deeply rooted in our nature that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement." If Death puts a stop to the long contention, and brings us final

emancipation from the evils that have so encumbered our souls, the hostile forces that have made such havoc of our ideals, and so thwarted our best endeavours, then Death is a grand and consolatory thought. To live *here* and to live *thus* always would be a prospect of despair. It will be heaven enough for many a wearied child of God to be rid of inborn sin, to have a blessed quietus given to the struggle between flesh and spirit, never more to have to say " when I would do good evil is present with me," never more as one that is in this tabernacle to " groan being burdened."

7. It ought to console us in the war with self that, while there may be momentary subjection to the remains of sin, along with that and compatible with that, *the will may be right, and the general bent of the soul may be toward God and holiness.* The seventh of Romans makes this quite evident. The apostle claims that, while the propensities and inclinations of an evil heart often proved too strong for him, the will itself was set in the right direction. " To will," he says, " is present with me." And so long as the will is not a consenting party to our sinfulness, we are not really sinful, we only become so when we intentionally and deliberately sin, and in that case we are not regenerate at all. As

William Law has it, " all our natural evil ceases to be our own evil as soon as our will turns away from it." Amid the momentary aberrations and overthrows occasioned by the risings of indwelling sin not only may the will be right, but the motive may be sincere, and the general current of the life may be mainly God-wards and holiness-wards in its flow. In the midst of all his misery and self-accusation the apostle is able also to report favourably regarding his attitude to the law of God. He uses three remarkable expressions: " I consent unto the law that it is good " ; " I delight in the law of God after the inward man " ; " So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God." So that all through the apostle was on the side of the law, was convinced of its excellence, took pleasure in its precepts and prohibitions, longed for conformity to its holy requirements, and was determined to make it the regulative principle of his conduct. Now every renewed soul shares these feelings of the apostle towards the law of God. They are characteristic of all them that are sanctified. While, then, the regenerate man falls into sin, before we can take the measure of his sinfulness we must give due consideration to the fact that, even amid his saddest overthrows and backslidings, deep down at the bottom of

his being, there is a consent unto the law, a delight in it, and a determination to obey it; that before he succumbs to the onsets of evil there is reluctance and resistance; that sin has not the concurrence of his better nature, nor does he ever put into it the full strength of his will; while afterwards there is retractation of it by regret and penitent self-renewal, and he can even look into the face of Christ again with some degree of trembling sincerity and say with Simon Peter: "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." And if these things are so, what better proofs could we have that after all, to use the language of Bunyan, the City of Mansoul is in possession of Emanuel, as God intended it should be, and not of another with Him—that grace, and not sin, has the upper hand in the soul.

8. It ought to prove a still further encouragement to us in the struggle with sin that dwelleth in us, with all the harassment and vexation that accompany it, that *it does not disturb our justification nor interfere with our state of acceptance with God.* After giving a detailed account of the painful conflict in the believer's soul with the bosom evils that stand in the way of the worthier life he desires to live, the apostle goes on in the very next breath to say: "There is therefore

now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). In a state of conflict the believer may be, but not in a state of condemnation; dire and deadly as the struggle may be, it does not impair his standing before God, nor make him any less justified or accepted. Sin may remain, hinder, vex, exasperate, but it cannot condemn; cannot ruin. Even when our fight is sorest with the evil tempers and appetites that work so mischievously within us, we can still fall back on this as a strong consolation: "I am not condemned." Much tribulation there may be, but no condemnation. Not that there is not much in us which deserves to be condemned, and for which we shall never cease to condemn ourselves, but still it cannot reverse the glorious acquittal given us in justification, nor throw us back into the old perilous position we were once in before we were reconciled to God at all. "There is therefore *now* no condemnation": the "now" here has reference to the painful experiences of the seventh chapter, and, reading the words in that connection, they may well fill us with joy. With all my warrings and strivings, with all my declensions and overthrows, with all my bafflings and defeats, yet even *now* there is no condemnation unto me because I am in Christ Jesus. A great deal of nonsense is

sometimes talked about getting out of the seventh of Romans into the eighth. There is no such getting out of the one into the other, for both are part and parcel of the same field of Christian experience. "I thank God," says Mr. Spurgeon, "that since my conversion I have never known what it is to be out of the seventh of Romans nor out of the eighth of Romans either. The whole passage has been solid truth to my experience. I have struggled against inward sin and rejoiced in complete justification at the same time."

9. It is characteristic of the genuine Christian experience that it is *on the whole and progressively a triumph.* There may be checks and eddies in the stream, but the main current of its flow is onward. Sin is overcome, and holiness advances. Conflict we must expect, but just as confidently may we expect victory. The result is not in doubt or in jeopardy. Paul, having asked how he was to be delivered, answers his own question: "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord." He who has led us into this Holy War will bring us off more than conquerors. Having begun the good work in us He will carry it on till He brings us to the sinless land, and gives us our inheritance amongst all them that are sanctified. What an inspiriting

prediction, what a golden assurance is that—"Sin shall not have dominion over you"! Robert Murray McCheyne was wont to say that he thought those words the sweetest in all the holy Book. They do not assure us of any immunity from the presence of sin, they do not say that sin shall not indwell us, that it shall not distress us, that it shall not at times gain a temporary advantage over us, but they do guarantee that it shall not have *dominion* over us: it may vex, but it shall not rule us; it may be a source of trouble, but it shall not lord it over the soul; it may even do us deadly mischief, but it shall not master or enslave us. Is it not written, "The Lord will bruise Satan under your feet shortly"? Many a partial fulfilment of that promise we have even here in the course of the conflict, and its complete fulfilment we shall have hereafter in the home of the holy, in the land where the inhabitant shall no more say "I am sinful" any more than he shall say "I am sick." Into that Eden sin shall not enter. No serpent shall lurk among the flowers of that Paradise. We shall carry with us no evil propensities, no fleshly instincts, no warring passions. We shall wear the image of the heavenly. No more addictedness to evil habit, no more backsliding, no more coldness or declension, no more

alienation from God, no more aversion to Divine things, no more swerving from rectitude, no more inconsistent walking, no more grieving of the Spirit. He that is entered into his rest hath ceased from all these. The Holy War is over. The soul is become a Holy Land, and not a Canaanite survives to vex or disturb.

CHAPTER V

ITS CULTURE

"All earnestness begins with self."—J. M. NEALE.

"There is too much Christian character lying dormant and latent, because there is so much neglect of self-culture."—SHEDD.

"Many do not lead a devotional life only because they do not comprehend the truth that such a life is a work in itself, and, being so, must be treated methodically."—LIDDON.

THE idea of culture and education has been too exclusively associated with the intellectual faculties. The training and discipline of our mental powers is a necessity recognised by all. A vast amount of industry is commonly expended on their developing and perfecting. But the training of conscience and will is a branch of education which receives far less attention than that given to mental culture. The heart is not put to school to anything like the same extent, or with anything like the same thoroughness, as the head; the strengthening of the affections is neglected; there is little systematic drill in

the practice of the particular virtues, while the nurture and expansion of the finer impulses and instincts of the soul are thought to be sufficiently provided for by being left to a process of self-evolution. Schools and colleges regularly turn out a percentage of men who make intellectual culture their aim, but evidence of the methodical culture of that side of life which is inward and spiritual, it must be confessed, is very much to seek. "Of spiritual exercises," says a modern writer, "men know next to nothing."

Now we shall make but slender advance in our religious life till we settle in our minds as fundamental that the living of it is an art, which must be studied as an art, and that proficiency in it depends on very much the same conditions as those which are annexed to any other art. Progress in it does not come by magic; there must be systematic culture, methodical training, patient self-discipline, an habitual schooling of ourselves, a diligent working along the lines of thought, prayer, experience, action, an "exercising of ourselves unto godliness." The whole business is carried on within in the gymnasium of the soul, while outwardly the life goes on in its usual routine. The practice of this inner athleticism opens up a wide field to which a whole volume might well be devoted. A few

general principles and suggestions are all that can be offered here.

I.—Thought Control

Thoughts are our companions which we cannot get rid of. Thousands of them pass through our minds in the course of every day. They are our constant society which we can never shake off. Hence the necessity for making the society as good as possible. It ought to be our daily business to direct our thoughts into proper channels, and make them call up such scenery as it is desirable for the mind to contemplate. Indulgence in useless, debilitating, unworthy thoughts is to be resolutely checked. It may be we cannot altogether prevent such thoughts from flitting across the mind like evil birds, but we need not suffer them to alight, or nestle in the mind. Let us scare the winged wanderers away. Nothing can do this so effectively as the preoccupation of the mind with better and nobler thoughts. If we habituate ourselves to think well and nobly, we can people our solitude, and relieve the most monotonous task-work with bright and pure thoughts which will keep away unwelcome intruders. A modern writer very truly observes, "Our religion has done nothing

for us unless it has given us an easy control over our thought-world."

II.—The Training of the Affections

Jonathan Edwards in that famous treatise of his "Concerning the Religious Affections," which is far too little read to-day, lays it down as a principle in the devout life which has always to be borne in mind that "the things of religion take hold of men's souls no further than they affect them," or, as he puts it elsewhere in language still more emphatic, "there never was anything considerable brought to pass in any man's heart or life by the things of religion that had not his heart deeply affected by those things." From these words of a writer, who in spiritual intensity and philosophic acuteness is only equalled by Augustine, we may infer what primary factors the affections are in the religious life, and how much depends on their proper cultivation. And how shall we cultivate them? We can only hope to stir and kindle the affections by bringing the proper objects of them vividly before the mind, by impressing the things of religion upon them till a lively apprehension of them is communicated, and the soul no longer contemplates them as an unconcerned and

indifferent spectator, but is inclined towards them, pleased by them, and is drawn forth in more lively and vigorous actings. Whether the particular affection be love or hope, or joy, gratitude, compassion, or zeal, by bringing to bear upon it considerations derived from the Gospel of Christ we can cause it to glow with a Divine warmth. Thus we are spiritually enlivened, and a new animation is imparted to our religious life. The importance of keeping the affections in a raised and kindled condition cannot be too strongly insisted on. We shall make but little progress in religion if we are not deeply affected by the things of religion. It is by maintaining the liveliness of the affections that we are saved from languor and numbness, from apathy and heaviness, and kept eager and forward in the things of God.

III.—The Training of Conscience

"The whole task of man," says a recent writer on ethical subjects, "may be regarded as an endeavour to make his conscience effective in life." How shall we best acquit ourselves of this task of making conscience more and more "effective" as the guide and supervisor of life? For one thing, we must be careful to enlighten

and inform the conscience, that it may be correct in its decisions, and clear in its directions. For another thing, we must seek to preserve the conscience *sensitive*, that it may discriminate between right and wrong with preciseness, and determine the nicer points in questions of character and conduct with insight and delicacy. Conscience must never be allowed to degenerate into a rough and ready reckoning of duty, weighing it only in the gross, and without any pretence to minute exactitude. Rather should we try to make it resemble one of those delicate instruments of scientific precision which estimates the tiniest globule, and vibrates even with a passing breath. As life advances the child of God should be not less but more particular about all that relates to character and conduct. That conscience may be sure to "go true," and may not be misled by example, or deceived by specious reasoning, let us bring it continually to the test of the supreme standard of righteousness, and summon it into the presence of that Divine Being with whom it is akin, and to whom it is accountable. Conscience is to be carried into the performance of every duty. Our endeavour must be to be conscientious in everything, faithful in that which is least as well as in that which is greatest. Yet a weak scrupu-

losity is to be avoided. To be conscientious is one thing, to pester ourselves with scruples about trifling and minor points is another. It need scarcely be said that nothing is so impairing to the moral sense, or so deteriorating to character as the stifling of conscience, or flying in the face of its behests. We should yield obedience to the faintest whispers of the voice within. Should the conscience become infected in its purity, or disturbed in its peace, by the commission of sin there is but one remedy—immediate recourse to the cleansing blood of Christ, which alone can tranquillise the conscience, and "purge it from dead works to serve the living God."

IV.—The Training of the Will

The Will is the governing faculty. It possesses the power of causation. It is the executive of the soul, the rudder of the life. All Christian discipleship begins in the dedication of the will to goodness, and when once that dedication has taken place the Will henceforth plays a great part in our sanctification. Through the consecrated Will there comes the stern resolve to keep clear of sin, the resolute determination to follow the right, the virtuous, the true. It is God that

worketh in us so to *will*, and He who gives us the power to will will go on to make it effectual by giving us also the power to *do* (Phil. ii. 12). Everyone acknowledges the force that resides in earnest purpose and resolution, and the wonderful things it effects in other departments. Why should we not realise its value in the religious life? Instead of this, teachers and spiritual guides have often fallen into the fatal mistake of setting themselves to crush the Will, or "break" it, as the phrase is. But no regimen ought ever to be adopted with a view to the suppression of the Will. Its whole strength will be needed for the battle of life. The aim should be rather to *guide* the Will, and keep it under the control of an enlightened judgment, and a good conscience. So long as it is divorced from egoism, and kept clear of the dangers of inconsiderateness and self-assertion, let the Will be developed to the utmost and the highest. "Break the Will forsooth!" exclaims Mr. Brierley in one of his brilliant essays, "one might as well talk of mending a watch by breaking its mainspring!" And he goes on to say what will certainly have the full concurrence of all who have thought upon the subject, that "to add to the Will's resources, to secure its freedom of action, to open up to it the way of inner reinforcement,

should be the one supreme object of spiritual education."

Let us cultivate the Will then. In its silent forces we have a powerful auxiliary, whose value for the purposes of the Christian life it would be difficult to overestimate. Let us set the sanctified Will to fortify the spirit against the onset of temptation. Let the Will stem the tide of wayward impulse, as the strong rower pulls against the stream. Let the Will, planting itself on God's promise and grace, repel the invasion of evil, as the sentinel closes the castle gate against the foe. Let the Will erect its barrier against the surge of passion, as the Hollander banks up his dykes to keep out the sea. Not only so, are there not unhealthy frames of mind and moods of soul on which we should bring to bear the regulative and controlling influence of the Will? Why should we ever succumb to melancholy, or droop in sadness, or shiver in coldness, or be benumbed in apathy, or be dumb with prayerlessness—why should we ever acquiesce in states of feeling so paralysing and so sinful, when our consecrated will-power might be exerted to terminate and dispel them? Instead of regarding them as something which we cannot help or prevent, something which we can only accept as inevitable, let us shake off

our supineness and set against them the power of holy resolution. Is it not the province of the Will, moreover, to set the mind in a right attitude, and to put the soul at a right angle for the reception of spiritual light, and for the incoming of celestial influence? Can it not fix the thoughts upon right objects? Can it not cause us to attend to religious truth? Can it not keep the heart in a right posture? Can it not largely create the soul's climate? Master in its own house, can it not decide what inmates shall have entrance within its doors, what pictures shall hang upon its walls, what business shall be transacted within its rooms? In these directions the Will can be trained to exercise a very wide dominion.

But it is in the Will's choices and decisions that special vigilance is called for. Repeated acts of choice tend to become fixed, till the habit of goodness is formed, and virtue becomes a second nature. Each decision made in the direction of right "strengthens a bent, deepens a groove, determines a current, builds up a character." The soul grows into the modes in which it has been habitually exercised. The Will presides over the whole process. Hence the saying of Novalis, "character is nothing but a perfectly educated Will." Let us attend to the

education of the Will, and give it all needful support in making its decisions, and in resisting those influences from within and without which would tend to dissipate its concentration and deprive it of energetic action. "It is only in the Will there is help."

V.—The Culture of the Feelings

Feeling is such an important factor in the inner life because, more even than intellect, it gives shape to conduct. We are impelled to action not nearly so much by any process of intellection as by our feelings. Ideas, views, opinions, are abstract and cold, and percolate but slowly to the springs of activity, but when a tide of feeling surges through the soul it comes with tremendous force, and we find ourselves borne forward upon its wave to great accomplishments, such as are sometimes a surprise to ourselves. It will be our wisdom, therefore, to encourage ourselves to feel strongly and deeply on the great concernments of the religious life. No matter how convinced the understanding may be, till the heart is moved the results will be inconsiderable. "There are few men," says Richard Baxter, "who do not know and remember things which would strangely work upon them,

and make great alterations in their spirits, if they were not locked up in their brain, and if they could but convey them down to their heart. Oh, what rare men they would be if the obstructions between the head and the heart were but opened, and their emotions did but correspond to their understandings."

The notion is widely prevalent that one can have no control over his feelings, that they are not amenable to the dictates of the Will, that they cannot be made an object of education, that in fact they seem only to have worth in so far as they are left entirely natural and free. But it must be insisted on that there is the possibility of training even the feelings, if not by any direct or positive method, at least indirectly and negatively. We can influence the sensibilities, we can repress them, we can project them into regions in which they can find for themselves a healthy interest. Above all, we can bring them under the control of reason and will. Whether it be love or hatred, pity or fear, admiration or resentment, sympathy or regret, the feelings must be kept under leash. We must never leave ourselves at their mercy, else they will hurry us into extremes, they will unduly elevate us, or unduly depress us, they will turn us into creatures of impulse, and make

us as variable and fluctuating as themselves. If the emotions are permitted to overflow their banks, much damage may ensue. What is to be steadily aimed at is that feeling shall become morally educated feeling, and the fact that it is susceptible of such education is one of the greatest possible consequence for the life of piety.

Some authorities like Schleiermacher have gone so far as to resolve the essence of all religion into feeling. This is an extreme position, but it is certainly safe to say that in religion there is a very large place for feeling. Indeed, we might go even further, and affirm that all true religion consists to a very great extent of pure and exalted feelings. What is love to God but a feeling, and what is love to our neighbour but a feeling? What are gratitude and penitence, kindness and generosity, joy and peace, but feelings? In times of hardness, and dryness, and self-complacency, what would not one give for feelings of tenderness? Who would not long for the heart of flesh to displace the heart of stone? Who can read the Psalms of David without wishing to experience David's feelings? There was a time in the soul history of John Bunyan when he deplored nothing so intensely as his inability to shed a tear, or even to desire to shed one. And which of us, in those dismal intervals

of spiritual unqualifiedness and aridity that come to every child of God would not join him in his lamentation? No doubt it is possible to overestimate feeling, and we certainly do so when we give it priority over principle and moral decision, but it is equally possible to underestimate it and speak slightingly of it.

The indulgence of feeling, however, merely for the sake of feeling is always to be deprecated. If emotion terminates on itself, and finds no practical outlet in strenuous action, it is both wasteful and injurious. To sit still and merely enjoy an emotional state, or revel in it as a species of spiritual luxury, impairs the moral fibre, and enfeebles the will. The very purpose for which emotion is given us is to drive the wheels of duty, and if it fails to do that, it has missed its primary end. Speaking of that large class of emotional people who will readily shed tears over some tale of pity, or some theatrical tragedy, but allow their emotion to evaporate in a mere wave of feeling, Dr. W. S. Bruce, in his "Formation of Christian Character," says: "To indulge in strong emotion without giving it an outlet in the corresponding action, is to indulge in a species of dram-drinking. It takes the edge off the conscience. It brings a veil over the moral vision. It acts as an opiate on the mind. And

the weakened will becomes as helpless to act a manly part as is the will of the street loafer, or that of the bibulous tear-shedding inebriate." At all costs, therefore, the connection between feeling and action must be preserved. Emotions can only benefit the character when they are translated into moral purpose and clothed in the garments of duty. It will save us from some of the recognised dangers of the Christian life if emotionalism is taken down from its mount of ecstasy into the commonplace valley of duty-doing and set to work there. It is all very well to be deeply stirred by religious feeling, but, as Phillips Brooks once remarked, " You must ask about its parentage and its offspring." In other words, from what source did the feeling in question arise ? How was it generated ? And then : What outlet did it find for itself ? What practical results did it issue in ? What fruits did it bear ? By the touchstone of these test questions must all emotionalism be put to the proof. Let all those exalted moments, rapturous utterances, turbulent excitements, and passionate demonstrations, that bulk so largely in the lives of some Christians, be confronted with this one searching inquiry : " What about their parentage, and what about their offspring ? "

CHAPTER VI

ITS CULTURE (*continued*)

"Cultivate your Christianity. It is worth cultivating."—SHEDD.

"It must be remembered that all goodness in living begins first in obeying rules, in keeping commandments."—J. R. MILLER.

"Will you not take me in hand? Tell me what I am to do with myself."—JOHN FLEMING in his Letter to Samuel Rutherford.

THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

IT is not enough to inculcate general principles, or ply men with vague exhortations to follow the example of Christ and live in newness of life. Particular instruction and counsel are needed if weak and erring mortals are to realise the Christian ideal. One cannot be content to remain a Christian *in general*. One must descend to *particulars*, and be a Christian in all those qualities and details which are regarded by the Christian consciousness as constituting the life of goodness.

What we are accustomed to speak of as the cardinal virtues, or duties, may be defined as

simply the chief forms in which the good life manifests itself, the outstanding excellences which are characteristic of it, or, as a modern philosophic writer describes them, "the various separate colours into which the perfect spectrum of character or conduct can be analysed." The classification of these virtues is an ethical task which has always been attended with some difficulty, and of which moralists, whether in ancient or modern times, have never been able to acquit themselves with complete success. When we open our New Testament we find little or no attempt at systematic classification or description. But we have occasional lists or summaries, as, *e.g.*, the beatitudes in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and in several passages in the Pauline epistles. The fullest enumeration perhaps is that given in Gal. v. 22—23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." A rich cluster is mentioned in Col. iii. 12—13: "Put on, therefore, holy and beloved, as the elect of God, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if any man have a complaint against any: and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." To these may be

added the many items of human worth which the Christian man is enjoined to claim and appropriate in the oft-quoted passage, Phil. iv. 8 : " Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." The Apostle Peter also furnishes a most valuable catalogue in the opening chapter of his second epistle : " And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity." While these passages do not pretend to completeness of representation, we may obtain from them a wonderfully full enumeration of the virtues possible to the Christian disciple. In the New Testament we find three words of very frequent occurrence repeatedly mentioned in close connection as the essential marks of Christian character in relation to God. These are Faith, Hope, and Love—usually denominated the theological virtues, because, as Thomas Aquinas says, " they have God for their object : they bring us into true relation

to God, and they are imparted to us by God alone."

From the Christian point of view the virtues are also graces, inasmuch as they are the product and outcome of grace. In St. Paul's conception they are the fruit of the Spirit—the natural and inevitable outgrowth and efflorescence of the spiritual life within. Hence the most effectual way of cultivating our virtues is to raise the general character and tone of the inner life, and bring it increasingly under the guidance and control of the sanctifying Spirit. But this by no means precludes the necessity for concentrating care and endeavour on each several virtue, exercising ourselves in the practice of it, and seeking to subdue in ourselves whatever antagonises it. The principle is as old as Aristotle, and has always obtained, that virtue is best acquired and perfected by doing virtuous acts—just as men become good harpers by harping, or good builders by building, so they become just by training themselves to act justly, and temperate by training themselves to act temperately. When we consult any of the devotional manuals which have proved such invaluable aids to the life of piety, like Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," Francis's "Introduction to the Devout Life," or Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of

Christ," we find them proceeding on the same assumption that proficiency comes by practice. If the Christian virtues are to be transcribed into our character and life, there to become realities, something more is necessary than fondly gazing and musing upon them. The fruit of the Spirit will not ripen within us without much watchfulness and care. There is such a thing as coaching oneself in the school of virtue, just as the scholar coaches himself in any subject he may be anxious to master. Hence the authors of these books, to which reference has been made, after unfolding the nature and beauty of each particular virtue, proceed to furnish us with definite rules for its cultivation; its opposites are plainly set forth that we may be on our guard to avoid them, and the difficulties likely to obstruct us in the practice of it, that we may know how to cope with them. This is the method followed by Jeremy Taylor, for example, in his famous manual. First something is said of each virtue in the way of general statement, then the opposite vice is indicated and a series of considerations are advanced as powerful dissuasives to deter us from it, and this again is followed by a number of explicit rules for the proper practice of the virtue in question. "I have told men," writes the saintly author, "what to do, and by what means they may be

assisted. If these rules be made familiar to our nature and the thoughts of everyday, they make virtue and religion easy and habitual." It is a suggestion which may often be acted on with advantage to select some one virtue, as our calling in life or peculiar spiritual needs may dictate, for special cultivation—at all events for a season. Of course, it must never be forgotten that all moral action is a unity. Virtue cannot be divided into compartments, or parcelled out into sections. Nevertheless it is possible, and not seldom advisable, while not neglectful of any of the virtues, to single out some one in which we may feel ourselves deficient, and concentrate our prayers and endeavours for a given time on its development. Say that we make Unselfishness to be the special object of our moral endeavour for so many months? Say that for six weeks we give ourselves to the methodical culture of Reverence? Or that for a similar period we choose Purity to be the object of our silent struggle? Who can doubt that such fixedness of aim and unity of effort would do much to forward us in the life of sanctity? At all events, such an eminent authority in matters of spiritual regimen as Francis of Sales strongly advises this course, devoting no less than two chapters of his great work to its advocacy.

"It is profitable," says he, "that everyone should choose a particular exercise of Christian virtue, not to abandon the rest, but to keep his mind in a more settled thought, order, and employment." There is room for a wise specialism in personal religious culture. Many no doubt are disposed to resent these attempts at living by rule. They are nervous about turning the Christian life, as it seems to them, into an affair of technique and regulation. It is apt to savour too much of the pedagogic and mechanical. We believe them to be mistaken. Discipline and drill play a more influential part in the formation of character and the sanctification of life, and do more to conduct us along the narrow way to heaven, than is generally allowed.

The following principles and advices, if fixed in the mind and frequently recurred to, would greatly contribute to our advance in the life of virtue :—

1. Let us *give specific and direct attention to our individual disposition and need.* Many persons fail in their religion, or make but little visible progress in it, just because they are so vague and purposeless in dealing with the requirements of their own personal life. They have no moral plan, no knowledge of themselves, no care, no

keeping of accounts. Such thoughtlessness can only end in bankruptcy. A man ought to take note of what is going on within him, and be so acquainted with his own weaknesses, disorders, private faults, and necessities, as to be able to apply to them definite and specific treatment. Knowing the complaint which threatens him, he ought to be ready with the remedy. He has his own problems of life and character peculiar to himself, and on these he should concentrate attention. He ought to know what to ask for in prayer, and what to examine himself about in his hours of self-inquiry. The general course of personal religious culture through which he puts himself ought to have a specific reference and adaptation to his own temper and lot, the incidents of his own career, the items of his own inner history, the requirements of his own soul.

2. Let us *discover our weak points, and characteristic failings, and take precautions against them.* By temperament or constitution we have each points where we are specially vulnerable, sides to our character where we are more open to attack; let us be more vigilant *there; there* let us set up our defences, and *there* collect our forces. Whatever faults we are inclined to, let us seek to give the soul a bias to the other extreme, and drill ourselves in the practice of the opposite.

The advice has come down to us from Aristotle, that when we find ourselves leaning towards the wrong our truest wisdom is to force ourselves off in the contrary direction, exactly as men do in straightening bent timber. Let the covetous man take lessons in systematic beneficence, and correct his stinginess by enforced liberality. Let the intemperate man bend himself in the direction of abstinence, by vows and pledges if need be. Let the irritable man put a bridle on his crossness and crabbedness, and compel himself in the direction of amiability and gentleness. By thus knowing our own disposition, and where it is weakest, by diligently ascertaining and naming our besetting faults and promptly applying a corrective treatment, it is in our power to carry ourselves from bad to good, and from good to better.

3. Let us *exercise a wise choice and control of circumstances*. There are surroundings which are favourable to the spiritual life, and there are surroundings which are deleterious and deadly. There are influences which bless, and heal, and elevate, and there are influences which depress, and blight, and destroy. There should be wise selection, therefore, of climate and environment. We cannot be too careful to give our virtues all the advantage that comes from localities, employ-

ments, companies, and recreations that tend to foster and develop them. It is equally incumbent on us to avoid such pursuits and associations as have a tendency to aggravate our constitutional faults and failings, or which might expose us to a breakdown, if we presumptuously venture into them. If we are to maintain our spiritual life, it behoves us to keep clear of everything that would damp or deaden it. If we are to "keep ourselves in the love of God," it can only be by not voluntarily exposing ourselves to the chilling atmosphere of irreligion and frivolity. Christian people often allow themselves a dangerous latitude in frequenting places, indulging in amusements, and forming companionships, which are about as conducive to their nearness to God and to their growth in the graces of the Holy Spirit as a coal-cellar would be to the growing of grapes or roses. Not realising their own temptableness, they will deliberately put themselves into circumstances where their feet are apt to slip. They will pray in the morning "Lead us not into temptation," and in the course of the day they will lead themselves into temptation by inviting it, by going in the way of it, by lingering in the neighbourhood of sin, and camping on the edges of dangerous territory.

4. Let us *persist in doing things which are difficult and uncongenial to us but which we know to be right.* There is nothing more valuable as a moral gymnastic, nothing more strength-giving to the soul, than to persevere in duty even when we are not in the mood for it and the doing of it is unattended with any feeling of agreeableness. It is a wholesome discipline to coerce ourselves to unpleasant tasks. "To confess ignorance," says Canon Liddon, "to confess wrong, to admit incapacity, to decline a reputation to which we feel we have no right—these things, and others of the same kind, are often hard and painful, but they are always of the greatest possible value in bracing the character." It is a safe rule to do good even when our heart is not as much in it as we could desire, and to keep to the path of obedience even when averse to it, or when we have little pleasure in treading it. We must never suspend our duty because we are not in the right mood for it, nor stop work because we feel no sweetness or liberty in doing it. If we only persevere, the right feeling will come. On the same principle the retention of forms and usages is advisable even when for the time being the soul has gone out of them. For any day the old warmth and life may come back to them. Adherence to habit will often

carry the soul along through a period of spiritual dryness and depression " until times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

5. Let us *abstain from certain courses which, though legitimate in themselves, may be dangerous to us.* We must be careful not to carry our Christian liberty even in lawful things too far. It is not enough barely to consider whether what we propose to do is allowable ; we have also to take into account whether it be fit for us to do, with our character and in our peculiar circumstances, whether the doing of it will tend to edify, whether it may possibly hinder or harm us in our Christian life : " All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient : all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not " (1 Cor. x. 23). Everything lawful in itself to be done is not therefore lawfully done. It is a safe rule, " Never go as far as you think you may." Many things innocent in themselves are mixed up with much that is not innocent, or, even when this is not the case, they may divert me from spiritual pursuits which have the first claim on my attention. In the Parable of the Great Supper it is noteworthy that the things which kept men away from Christ and His great redemption were not criminal or sinful things,

but things in themselves quite proper and legitimate. If I find that frequenting certain places, mixing with certain companies, participating in certain pastimes, darkens my vision of the things beyond, enfeebles my better part, hinders my prayers, clips the wings of my aspiring spirit, or disturbs the closeness of my walk with God, then I am left with no option but abstinence and suppression. There is a narrow path of self-denial along this line which each of us may mark out for himself and follow to his great spiritual advantage.

6. Let us *resist evil, not so much by direct opposition, as by not attending to it, and turning the mind another way.* Anselm of Canterbury was once asked for a directory of the spiritual life. Part of his reply was to this effect: "Do not contend with evil thought or inclinations of the mind, but get yourself right earnestly engaged with a good thought or purpose till these thoughts vanish. Never will a thought or volition be banished out of the heart unless it be by one of an opposite character." Preoccupy the mind with that which is elevating and pure, and keep it busy with such things, and there will be no room for impurity and sin. The founder of one of the great religious Orders in the third century told his followers that "the soul is preserved by

good thoughts." To engage the attention with objects of a higher order will often divert the mind, and help it to baffle and evade the swarm of worthless thoughts and evil solicitations that infest it. This can often be done by repeating verses of the Bible, or stanzas of hymns, by some direct act of devotion, or by recalling to mind some of the watchwords or maxims of the Christian life.

7. Let us *take advantage of the power of habit and enlist it on the side of virtue.* We all know how by constant repetition of the same act we acquire increased facility in the doing of it, and eventually take pleasure in doing what originally was done with much conscious effort and self-restraint. What was once a task becomes a pleasure. Mental grooves are gradually formed, beaten tracks, along which the activities of the life come to run easily, and almost naturally. The soul, like the body, grows into the modes in which it is habitually exercised. And once the good habit is formed it becomes a power to virtue friendly. Indeed, virtue has been defined as " excellence under the power of habituation." By forming good habits a man " creates a moral tradition for himself," and once that tradition is established, he will not readily depart from it, nor act inconsistently with it. The rules for

the forming of habit are simple. Those suggested by Professor James are the following :—

(1) " Launch yourself on the new course with as strong an initiative as possible." In other words, cut clear of the associations which may imperil your purpose. Commit yourself boldly to it, and make no provision for retreat.

(2) " Never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is securely rooted in your life." A single lapse will undo more than a great many attempts can accomplish. A break in the continuity you are seeking to establish is a serious set back.

(3) " Seize the very first opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every prompting you may experience in the direction of the habits you may aspire to form."

(4) " Force yourself to act on the better impulse even when something in you harks back."

(5) " Take pains to keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day."

(6) " Do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it."

8. *Let us be inflamed with a fervent desire to make somewhat better creatures of ourselves every day.* We may rest assured the Lord will never make us anything high or good that we ourselves do not urgently desire and strongly intend. Let this bracing word of Thomas à Kempis be carried in the memory and said over to ourselves every morning: "Daily ought we to renew our purposes and to stir up ourselves to greater fervour as though this were the first day of our conversion, and to say: 'Help me, my God, in this my good purpose, and grant that I may now this day begin perfectly; for that which I have done hitherto is as nothing.'"

CHAPTER VII

ITS CULTURE (*continued*)

"Religious meditations are the first things in which spiritual-mindedness consists."—SINCLAIR.

"The spirit of a man takes its character from the themes of its meditation."—SHEDD.

"If you can pray aright, you have mastered the great secret of the spiritual life."—GOULBURN.

WE have now to inquire as to the instruments or means of virtue, the measures to be employed for the maintenance and promotion of the virtuous life. Dorner defines them as "special arrangements partly in existence already, partly to be found out by the Christian himself, which serve to strengthen virtue." To these belong Contemplation, Prayer, use of the Word of God and the Sacraments, Self-examination, Penitential Discipline, and Association with the Christian Community. Some of these have been already adverted to in other connections, but those that remain are so vitally important as to entitle them to separate treatment.

Progress of the Soul

I.—Contemplation

In contemplation, the spirit, withdrawing itself from the many distractions of life, and breaking away from the cares and occupations in which it is daily immersed, fixes its attention on Divine things and dwells upon them in devout meditation. It is the soul saying to all worldly thoughts and associations as Abraham did to his servants at the foot of the mount : " Stay you here, while I go and worship yonder." This has an elevating and sanctifying effect. It gives us a realising view of the unseen realities. It raises us above this time-scene, and saves us from being the slaves of sense. It spreads out the soul to the down-coming of supernatural influences from the realm of the invisible, like Gideon's fleece exposed to the dews of heaven. It keeps holy subjects long enough before the mind for us to draw from them nutrition and refreshment. Truth never becomes operative and invigorating if we only glance at it in a passing way and hurry on : it must be lovingly dwelt upon, and brooded over, if it is to come to perfection. As has been well said, " meditation is the one duty that improves all our other duties." If it does not add any new stores to our knowledge, it turns the truths already received and remembered into heightened

resolve, glowing affection, and holy walk and conversation. Meditation has a wide field to range over and many objects to work upon—God and his perfections, the image of Christ, the truth of Scripture, the promises of the Gospel, the excellencies of virtue, our future hopes, the heavenly inheritance. If we never think on these things, how can they have any effect on us? And how, except by thought and meditation, can we have any converse with them? There is no other medium of intercourse. It is not possible that our religion can influence us if we never occupy our thoughts and feelings with it. If we never think of God and Christ, they might as well be non-existent. If we never contemplate our heavenly Home, it might as well be a piece of cloudland, or a fairy palace, for any real influence it is exerting upon us. Dr. Alexander MacLaren says: "The degree in which we do think of these unseen realities is a fairly accurate measure of our Christianity. Apply that sharp test," he continues, "to yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and tell me how much of your life was pagan, and how much of it was Christian."

Meditation ought, therefore, to be an habitual practice with us. Time should be carefully set apart for it, or, failing this, the pauses and

intervals that occur even in the busiest life should be faithfully taken advantage of. If there was only a disposition, how often, even in the din and press of business, might the thoughts and ejaculations be sent upward, and the work of our hands be none the worse for it. Of the poet Burns it was said that "while his hand was on the plough his heart was with the muse." And if the Christian were as absorbed in religion as Burns was in poetry, it could often be said of him too, that while his hands were busy with the daily round, the common task, his thoughts were holding converse with Heaven. Still, it will be an immense moral and spiritual gain if, periodically, time can be set apart for meditation. It remains true also that meditation is best conducted in *solitude*. That is sage advice of the saintly Herbert :

> "By all means
> Use sometimes to be alone :
> Salute thyself, see what thy soul doth wear."

We live in a time when we are tyrannised over by the outwardness of life, when the incessant claims of business and pleasure leave us but a narrow margin for devotion, when the sense of the spiritual is benumbed, and the Divine seems far away. All the more reason, therefore, for

the reverie of lonely thought. All the more reason why we should often make our escape from the noise and hurry of the world and be alone with God, and with the truth of things. In this we shall be but following the example of saintly souls in all ages—of Isaac in the fields at eventide, of Jacob at Bethel, of David in the land of the Hermonites and the hill Mizar, of Nathanael under the figtree, of Peter on the housetop, and of the Divine Master himself, of whom it is so frequently recorded that He went apart by Himself to a mountain, or withdrew into a solitary place. We do need the still hour. We do need the seclusion of the secret place. It is there that we talk with God, that our walk with God grows closer, that we drink from the eternal fountains, that the things of the other world become more real and more sweet to the soul. It is there that the atmosphere of our spirit is freshened by breezes from eternity. It is there that our noblest resolutions are born. In solitude and silence we correct our mistaken estimates, take the bearings of our life, and equip ourselves for the demands that the future may make on us. It is in these hours of retreat from the world that we gather the strength and balance that enable us to return to it helpfully. "It is in solitude," says Dr. James Martineau,

" the hero is strengthened for his field. It is there that the soul gathers up its collective forces to bear down upon the piecemeal difficulties of life."

In most directories for the spiritual life much importance is attached to what is called the soul's *recollectedness*. And rightly so, for it is an urgent necessity that periodically the human spirit shall rally itself at the centre, call home its thoughts, brace up its faculties, replenish its springs of action, by putting itself in communication with the Fountain of all life. Failing to do so, we shall incur the penalty of slackening, disheartenment, and abortiveness. Our activities, multiply them as we may, will lack the forcefulness that makes them *tell*. We shall not have enough strength and sufficiency to put into our work. There is an immense amount of fussy activity, even among Christian people, which is worthless and comes to nothing, because there has been no waiting upon God, no filling of the springs of action, and because the inner life which is lived in secret has been sacrificed to that portion of the life which is visible to the eyes of men. " Life may be feverishly busy, and spread itself far and wide, whilst all the time the source of life dries up." We all know how mournfully possible such an experience is. It can only be

averted by that spiritual *recollectedness* which results from retirement and meditation.

II.—Prayer

Prayer has been defined as "the talk or converse of the soul with God as a present Being." It is not only the most characteristic action of religion, but its vital breath. It is the very soul of devotion. It is the abiding background of the Christian life. It is described in Scripture as a "coming unto God," a "calling upon His name," a "pouring out of our hearts before Him," a "drawing near to God," a "making known of our requests unto God." The degree in which we are conversant with prayer is perhaps the best standard with which to estimate our true condition. Nothing does so much to promote the well-being of the soul as to have the thoughts and desires directed towards Him who is their one sole and adequate object. It must be pre-eminently good for us to draw near to Him who is the source of all good. By such intercourse we are lifted into the presence of the highest and the best. We sun ourselves in the light of God's countenance. We cast our burden upon Him. We stretch forth our hands to Him for help. We implore those blessings which every human

spirit needs and without which we are poor indeed. We hold commerce with Heaven, and fetch in those fresh supplies of grace in the absence of which our whole religious life will fade as surely as flowers on which falls no moistening dew. From the stifling miasma-laden atmosphere of a world that is too much with us the soul "escapes to the empyrean, and bathes its ruffled plumes in the ethereal and Divine."

Prayer has confessedly a *transforming* power. It was when Jesus was rapt in prayer on the mountain top that "the fashion of His countenance was altered." In our case also, if we only live in the spirit of Mount Tabor, communion with God will alter the fashion, if not of our looks, certainly of our mind and character. Prayer will leave upon us an unmistakable impress; it will change us for the better, will refine and elevate our nature, give to the life an altered cast, and invest us with a radiance and a beauty not of this world.

More remarkable, however, than any subjective effects of prayer upon the suppliant himself are the direct and immediate benefits it confers. Which of us who has made prayer the habit of his life cannot recall some blessing or other which has been as plainly an answer to prayer as if it had been brought to him by an angel's hand?

There is no praying soul who cannot tell of blessings received, of burdens lightened, of sins forgiven, of fears dispelled, of moral deficiencies supplied, of crooked things made straight and rough bits of the road made smooth, of exhausted energies recruited, of failing resolution newly braced and set to run again the heavenly race. Truly does Mr. Spurgeon say "there has been nothing grandly great or good in our spiritual life but Jabbok has flowed close by it and the top of Carmel has been near to view, where we have wrestled with God and prevailed."

If prayer is to be a means of virtue and a real aid to the inner life, it must be *habitual*. If a man does not pray usually and with regularity, can prayer be said to have any true place in his life at all? Offered only occasionally or intermittently, supplication cannot end in any great or lasting result. Spasms of prayer are but indications of a dying piety, as the flickerings of a lamp before the flame goes out. Little bits of praying dotted here and there over the life, with long stretches of prayerlessness between, are but a form of trifling. Edward Payson says: "The promise of God is not to the *act* but to the *habit* of prayer." Always dependent, always in need of blessing, always exposed to temptation, always passing through an enemy's

country, "men ought *always* to pray." Whatever happens, never must we slacken in prayer, nor under any circumstances, or for any reason, must we ever think of abandoning prayer, or discontinuing it.

It will be of great assistance to us in maintaining the habitual practice of prayer to have *regular times* set apart for devotion. It is all very well to say that the spirit of prayer should run like an undertone through all our tasks and duties. But the spirit of prayer will soon disappear if there be not special seasons for recruiting it. While looking at all life as sacred, and refusing to allow any portion of our time to be profane or irreligious, it is quite needful to rail in certain hours for devotion, and if need be jealously to guard them by rule and regulation from interruption and encroachment. "Stated time," says Richard Baxter, "is a hedge to duty, and defends it against many temptations to omission." So, instead of leaving a duty of such pre-eminent importance as prayer to any little interstices or corners of life that may chance to remain over after all other engagements have been provided for, let us put the hedge of "stated time" around it, lest we be tempted to relax or omit it. If we have no fixed time set apart for prayer, the chances are we shall forget to pray altogether.

Never should it be left to uncertainties whether the exercise shall be attended to or not. Let it be considered a positive fixed thing, no more to be dispensed with than eating, or sleeping, or walking.

Our devotional arrangements should also provide for *special seasons* of *protracted prayer*. These may arise, not spasmodically, nor by any process of forcing, but rather as a natural outgrowth from the regular daily prayer of all the year round. Such extraordinary times of devotion are desirable, if only to impart a fresh novelty and interest to our prayer life, and they will often be called for by special exigencies, or the peculiar circumstances in which we may be placed. In any case, as Matthew Henry says, "we have always these two things to keep us long at prayer—we have much business at the throne of grace, and we delight in communion with God." Our Lord Himself has left us more than one example of prolonged prayerfulness. Luke tells us how on one occasion He "continued all night in prayer to God." Usually these seasons of protracted devotion were preparatory to some crisis in his life, to some day of special effort, or some important step in his career, such as the ordination of the twelve apostles. We, too, in our humble measure have occasions of

frequent occurrence when we have to face great changes in life, when we are called upon to make some momentous decision, when we have to make some new departure, or embark on some new undertaking, or when we shudder at the approach of impending ill. What more natural at such times than to set apart a special season for more lengthened and abounding prayer? One may also have anniversaries in his own life, or the lives of his friends, which he chooses to mark by some similar form of holy celebration. To those who live near to God many such opportunities are sure to arise; yea, they will not be slow to create opportunities. Too much cannot be said of the gains that accrue to the soul from such seasons of special devotion, or the moral advancement to which they lead. We little know what a marked enrichment of the Christian life may result from even one such experience! One night of lonely prayer by the brook Jabbok made a new man of Jacob. It changed the supplanter into a prevailing prince, and as he passed over Peniel "the sun rose," in token, it would seem, of the brighter sunrise within that irradiated his soul!

Praying by the hour together if needful, but not forgetting also to practise that kind of prayer, the very opposite in its nature, commonly

called *ejaculatory*, which has been aptly described as "the small change of prayer," that is, prayer in its briefest, handiest form, easily put into currency, ready for use on all and sundry occasions. It consists of short addresses and appeals sent up to heaven in the very midst of our crowded tasks and engagements, sparks of devotion flying upwards from the flaming forge of the heart, little arrows of supplication shot heavenward, instantaneous telegraphic communications dispatched by the soul to headquarters, like the prayer of Nehemiah sandwiched in between the question addressed to him by royalty and the answer he was expected to give, like Peter's drowning cry, "Lord, save me," or the publican's "God be merciful to me a sinner." The advantage of this kind of prayer is that it is always easy to find place and opportunity for it; it scarcely needs even a pause: it does not hinder business; it interferes with no engagement; it is "prayer on the spot." Yet, brief and momentary as these ejaculations of the praying soul may be, their value is beyond all price. Do they not bring down many a blessing into the life, do they not help to connect everything we do with God, do they not keep us in touch with the unseen, do they not bring us guidance when the way of duty is not clear, do they not often check

us in times of temptation, and keep us from doing what afterwards we might bitterly regret? And this also may be cited in their favour, that they enable us to live in the spirit of prayer, and to comply in a very real sense with the apostolic precept: "Pray without ceasing." By means of them, moreover, prayer and service are happily blended and interwoven. "It is not so much prayer before our work, or prayer when the work is over, that brings the blessing," says Dr. Andrew Bonar, "but prayer mixed up with the work while it is going on." It is one great advantage of ejaculatory prayer that it enables us to comply with this condition.

The more spiritual any duty is the more apt we are to fail and flag in it. Moses praying in the mount grows weary sooner than Joshua fighting in the plain. Continuance in prayer is not easy. Ask any Christian who has grown grey in the discipleship of Christ, and kept up the habit of prayer through a long life, if he has found it so. He who would pray must be prepared to encounter many obstacles.

> "What various hindrances we meet
> In coming to the mercy-seat!"

1. There is a certain *backwardness* and *disinclination to pray*. Even some of the best of men have had to confess this—men so eminently

devout as Jeremy Taylor, and John Newton, and Thomas Shepard. Strange that it should be so, and perhaps only to be explained as a sad evidence of that lamentable alienation from God and aversion to Divine things which is rooted so deeply in our nature and survives so persistently even in the sanctified. What Christian does not find himself at times inclined to restrain prayer, to omit prayer, to get it soon over, to invent excuses for the evasion of it? In such seasons of reluctance and slackness we cannot do better than recall the bracing words of Brother Lawrence, himself an expert in prayer: "Be not discouraged by your repugnance to prayer. It is your fallen nature to feel that repugnance. But you must do yourself violence in that matter. Often at the outset you will think it lost time; but go on in spite of all your difficulties." Yes, we must often "do violence" to our fallen nature and compel ourselves to pray. Not seldom at the outset we may find ourselves backward and disinclined, but when we have gone on and persevered a little we shall get into a better praying frame, and warming to the work, we shall have liberty and enjoyment. "Men plead difficulty," says Thomas Shepard, the New England Puritan; "I plead advantage. For he that overcometh

his indisposition to pray shall eat of the hidden manna."

2. There is the temptation to *discontinue* or *abandon* prayer. In our folly we fancy ourselves so strong and self-sufficing that we can afford to outgrow prayer, or dispense with it. There may be at the time no very pressing want, no urgent danger, no special emergency to drive us to have recourse to God. Or the unbelieving thought may steal into the mind, "God does not hear my prayer." Or we may fall a prey to that general scepticism about prayer which creeps at times over us all like a cold mist over the landscape. Saint Theresa declares that the leaving off of prayer was the most deadly temptation she ever met with. It is a temptation to be resisted at all costs. All is indeed over with us if once we give over prayer. To cease from the practice of prayer is to cease to employ our chiefest means of good, to forgo our greatest privilege, to let our grandest resource go unused. "Praying always" must be our watchword. What else can we do? To whom shall we go?

3. There is the temptation to *hurry* or *abridge* our prayers. True, the time spent in prayer need not be long, but it should at least be long enough to get some good out of our devotions. Time is one of the chief standards of value. The

time we devote to anything is a sure index and measure of the interest we take in it. We need to *take time* for our intercourse with God. But instead of that, prayer is too often pushed into the corners and crevices of a crowded life. I have so much business on hand to-day, so many letters to answer, so many engagements to keep, I really have no time for prayer, or if I pray at all, the prayer is slurred over, or cut short, or hurried through before I rush out of doors. And so, as Dr. Alexander Whyte has it, "we are up and away before God has time to answer us. Swift as the angel Gabriel can fly, we are no longer there when he arrives. A doctrine, a promise, a psalm, a hymn, *take time* to get hold of our hearts." Let us think of this next time we pray. Let us try so to order our affairs and our households that the little space hedged round for our communion with God shall not be encroached upon, nor our prayers hindered by our being cumbered like Martha with too much serving. To omit prayer even for a single occasion will often undo more than many punctual observances of the duty will make up for. That is a true and salutary word of Thomas à Kempis which we would do well to have much in our thoughts—"the omission of spiritual exercises seldom passes without some loss to the soul."

4. We have to reckon with *distractions* in prayer. Even in the fruitful field of devotion tares and weeds will come up apace. While the body is in the posture of prayer the mind will often be infested with unhallowed and wandering thoughts, which swoop down upon our prayer-offering as did the ravenous birds upon Abraham's sacrifice. Would that we could drive them away as easily as Abraham did the winged intruders, for they mar our devotion and disturb our fellowship! We are in the Temple of God, our own hearts are His Temple, but these unwelcome visitants profane its sanctity with their unholy traffic, and too often we have no scourge of small cords with which to expel them. What are we to do? Is there any remedy? There is no mental wand of enchantment that can wave away these distractions, or make them suddenly to cease. But we can remember for our encouragement how it is written: "likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." This assurance is given with special reference to prayer. It is our "infirmities" in prayer to which the assistance of the Spirit is promised. Let us plead the promise, and cry to our unseen Helper to give us a sober and recollected state of mind. And should we not make these wandering thoughts themselves the subject of

prayer and tell the Lord about them? While, by themselves, they may be a very unfit and unacceptable offering, yet sincere petition to be rid of them may be a most suitable offering, with which God will be well pleased. To one who complained of distraction in prayer John Keble's advice in his "Letters of Spiritual Counsel" is: "Turn your troublesome thoughts themselves into prayer." Jeremy Taylor recommends that "when we have observed in ourselves any considerable wandering of thought we should repeat that part of the prayer again with actual attention. In any case," he says, "be sure to say a hearty Amen to the whole prayer with one united desire, for it is that desire that does the great work of the prayer." But no expedient will much avail unless there be resolute exertion. We must set the will heartily against these distractions, antagonise them with the more fixed principles of the mind, and seek to dislodge them by occupying ourselves beforehand with better thoughts that will repel the more frivolous ones—the thought of whose presence it is we are in, of Christ's mediatorship which alone makes prayer possible, of the dignity of the mercy-seat, and at what infinite cost it was established for the sons of men!

5. There is the discouragement arising from

the *absence of sensible comfort and enjoyment in prayer.* Many will ask themselves, Ought we to go on praying when our hearts are dry and we have no sense of liberty or sweetness? Yet that is just the time when they ought to persevere, for there is all the more spirituality in the exercise when it happens to be unattended with any relish or delight, and we may be all the surer that we are doing it from right motives and out of a pure conscience of duty, rather than for the sake of the pleasurable frames and feelings that may chance to accompany it. "It is very prejudicial to proficiency in prayer," says such an eminent authority in such matters as St. Theresa, "to use it for the gust and consolation that a man receives at the time. I know my own experience that he who determines to pray, not much heeding either immediate comfort or dejection, has got into one of the best secrets of prayer." There are two other authorities whose counsel has done so much to comfort praying souls in their apprehensions and distresses that the reader will be grateful to me for reproducing what they say for his benefit. One is Jeremy Taylor, who writes: "As we must not judge our devotion to be barren nor unfruitful when we want the overflowings of joy running over, so neither must we cease for want of them. If

our spirits can serve God out of pure conscience of our duty, it is better in itself, and more safe to us." The other is John Keble, who in a letter to one who had become disheartened in prayer because of the absence of any feeling of enjoyment or assurance, says: "Prayer which seems to yourself cold and formal, offered and persevered in as a duty, may win you a greater blessing than that which seems to flow most freely, and which gives more comfort at the time."

6. There is the difficulty of *prayer after backsliding*. One of the hardest things in the Christian life is to pray after having fallen into sin. How shall we ever look Christ in the face again after so shamefully offending? We are tempted to postpone coming at all. We think it better to let a certain interval elapse under the idea that our guilt will die away of itself and be forgotten, or at least the sense or smart of it be less vivid in the conscience. We wait till the freshness of it fades, or till we are able to make some reparation for what we have done. An eminent saint of God has left it on record that the most devilish temptation she ever met with was the temptation to leave off prayer after sin committed. To do so is a ruinous mistake. It is to leave off prayer just at the time and in the condition when we need it most. Whatever strength and hope

may yet be possible are to be found only in the continuance of prayer. Whatever good may come to us from attempting to draw near to God, we shall certainly get no good by staying away from Him. Will our guilt get any less for delay? Can it be cancelled by being oblivious about it? What if death should intervene in the meantime and find us unshriven? No, instead of doing anything so suicidal as adding to our other sins the yet greater sin of despair, we shall be well advised to do as John Bunyan did, who in this, as in so many other matters of the soul, has left us an example: "I soon came to see," says he, "that there was only one way left to me. I must go humble myself before Christ that, in His amazing grace, He would again have mercy on this wretchedly sinful soul of mine." And James Fraser, of Brea, came to the very same conclusion: "After my slips and stumbles Satan tried hard to drive me to despair. He tried to confound me with what I had done. He tried hard to hold me down. He did his best to keep me from ever getting on my feet again. Whereas my best way was immediately to seek a fresh pardon and then go back to my work." Yes, that is ever the best way—immediate recourse to the open fountain. "If any man sin"—that is always the tragic

possibility; but it is provided for in the gospel of grace. Provision is made even for that dark contingency. "If any man sin"—in that very hour of humiliation and distress let him remember this—"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

CHAPTER VIII

ITS CULTURE (*continued*)

"Too few really credit the power of the Word in building up holy character, and therefore too few make diligent experiment of the process."—A. J. GORDON.

"One very general mark of the Spirit's work upon the soul is the new taste and the new intelligence wherewith a man now looks upon the Bible."—DR. CHALMERS.

"Good and holy books are a powerful agency in the Economy of Grace."—GOULBURN.

"Bring with thee the books."—ST. PAUL.

USES OF THE WORD

SCRIPTURE is of supreme importance for our whole spiritual life. It is the source of religion, and the very spirit of religion speaks to us from its pages, and moves us. The breath of eternity exhales from it. It treats of the highest concerns of the soul, and inspires us with the holiest thoughts and feelings. As we set out on our solemn journey through this world to another there has been put into our hands a holy Book, written for the soul by the soul's Author, which will stand us in such stead as nothing else can in the tribulations of life, and in our last hour.

Of this volume it can be truly affirmed that "it teaches all truth, commands all holiness, and promises all happiness." "If a man has lost God," said the German poet Heine, "he may find Him in this Book." And we may add, if a man has found God, he may go on to find Him still more fully and more satisfyingly in this Book of God than in any other direction.

It is of the Bible studied devotionally, and for the private benefit of our own soul, that we have now to speak. There is the Bible of the critic, the Bible of the scholar, the Bible of the expert, but these do not come within the scope of our purpose. We are not concerned with the literary aspects of the Book—its authorship, its composition, its history, its poetry, its archæology, its science. There is a subtle snare here into which we may easily be betrayed. Andrew Bonar writes in his "Diary": "I fear that my delight in the Scriptures is very much because of the joy of the understanding." It is sadly possible to be intellectually interested in the Bible, and yet to miss its spiritual intent and its redeeming message. Sadly possible is it also to delude ourselves with the idea that we are studying the Bible when we are only studying it in handbooks, commentaries, treatises, and so forth, neglecting all the while the holy Book itself, for which

nothing can ever be a substitute. Dr. Godet, the famous commentator, gives this word of warning to a divinity student: "Never drift away (as I did for long) into fancying that your exegetical reading can suffice for your spiritual profit. You may swallow a great deal of that bread without having a crumb of the true bread of life which feeds the soul."

It is with the Bible itself, then, we are concerned and its uses for holiness and edification. It is the book in which God speaks to us, and therefore it may be expected to exercise a potency and an influence peculiarly its own. "The words that I speak unto you," said Jesus, "they are spirit and they are life." No other words affect us as they do. They enlighten the mind, revolutionise the conduct, transform the character. Contact with these Divine oracles will guide our thoughts, educate our souls, kindle our moral aspirations. The translators of 1611 did not claim too much when they said in the forcible and eloquent language of their Preface to the reader: "If we be ignorant, the Scriptures will instruct us; if out of the way, they will bring us home; if out of order, they will reform us; if in heaviness, they will comfort us; if dull, quicken us; if cold, inflame us."

1. Think of what the daily reading of the

Word and the keeping of its truths before the mind for protracted periods will do in the way of *sanctifying* us: "sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth." The commands of Scripture bind us to morality. Its facts and truths all tend to produce holiness. Its precepts and promises afford a sanctifying light. It holds up before us continually a perfect ideal of sanctity in the life and example of Jesus Christ, and as we gaze on it we are changed into the same image.

2. Think of what it will do in *guiding* us. David declares that "God's testimonies were the men of his counsel" (Ps. cxix. 24). He had more safety and satisfaction in following the advice of the Word than when he was advised by the collective wisdom of all his State counsellors assembled in conference. We have in Scripture the best lessons and precepts by which any human creature trying to be faithful can direct his course. We are sure to go right if we keep close to what the Book tells us. Whatever the intricacies of our pathway through life, we shall thread our way safely through them if we but follow the clue of Scripture. Not seldom, in times of perplexity and doubt, we have received from some isolated word or passage of the Bible guidance as mysterious and oracular as ever the

high priest of old spelt out from his shining Urim and Thummim. "Oftentimes when you do not know what to do," says Mr. Spurgeon, "you will see a text leaping out of the Book and saying 'Follow me.' I have seen a promise sometimes blaze out before my eyes, just as when an illuminated device flames forth upon a public building. One touch of flame and a sentence or design flashes out in gas. I have seen a text of Scripture flame forth in that way to my soul. I have known that it was God's word to me, and I have gone on my way rejoicing."

3. Think of what it can do in *strengthening* us. The Word is as the bread of heaven to the hungering soul. It is the soul's very livelihood and maintenance, nourishing and sustaining it unto life eternal. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and they were unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." Stored away in the pages of the Book there are supplies of celestial viands, of which if a man eat he shall be energised anew. There are all sorts of restoratives to which we can have recourse in our fainting-fits and times of weakness. How a verse of Scripture will often act as a tonic to the soul! How a single promise

will often prove a leaf from the Tree of Life for the healing of our nature! Close, fresh contact with revelation day by day will make us strong for duty and equal to the whole calling and responsibility of life. "I gathered His words for my food," said John Bunyan, "and as antidotes against my faintings."

4. Think of what it can do in *enlivening* us. The Word of God is not only the means of imparting life in the first instance, but of maintaining and invigorating that life afterwards. When we sink into a low and heavy condition, when dampness and deadness fall like a frost upon the spirit, when our graces languish, and all feeling of freshness and fruitfulness is lost, how often have we had occasion to say with the psalmist, "thy Word hath quickened me!" As we pondered its truths, examined ourselves in the light of its warnings, humbled ourselves before its judgments, heartened ourselves with its promises, and invigorated ourselves with its transporting hopes and prospects, we were conscious of a great reviving, the deadness and dulness were gone, and we experienced a new warmth and sensibility. We had got more life from the life-giving Word. It was as if one suffering from cold had drawn near the fire. Speaking of the enlivening effects of the Word,

Matthew Henry records it as his experience: "It has many a time made me lively when I was dead in duty; it has quickened me *to* that which is good when I was backward and averse to it, and it has quickened me *in* that which is good when I was cold and indifferent."

It is not every kind of reading of Scripture, however, that is attended with profit. The Bible may be approached along wrong lines, and be read to little purpose. "How readest thou?" is our Lord's own question. Surely there ought to be some method of reading, and our reading ought to be conducted according to some guiding maxims and principles which will tend to make it salutary and helpful.

1. Let us read *with minds prepared thereunto and awake to what we do.* We are not always in a fit state to read the Bible. We need to free ourselves from distractions and the jangle of affairs before we engage in the holy task. It is not the newspaper we are taking up, nor some work of fiction. The reading of the Book is an act of worship. Let us put off the shoes from our feet, for the place whereto we approach is holy ground. It is an act of devotion, and therefore we should pray for a blessing on what we read before we open the volume. We are going to hear what God the Lord will say to us from

His Word. Therefore we may well summon the attendance of our best powers and be all on the alert. Such high employ ought not to be deteriorated by indolence. Let us not come to the Book sleepily, nor yawn while turning over its leaves.

2. Let us read *understandingly*. There is much so-called reading of the Bible which leaves us really ignorant of the Bible, because there has been no attempt to penetrate the meaning of what is read. For, be it remembered, that only the meaning of Scripture is Scripture. It is not in the letter, but in the vital and luminous content, that the voice Divine is to be looked for. As the verses pass under our eye we must try to make out what the Spirit means by this and by that, for we may rest assured that no good will ever come to us from anything we do not understand: we shall get neither blessing for the soul nor guidance for the life out of truth that we do not comprehend. "If ye had known *what that meaneth*" was our Lord's word to the Scribes and Pharisees, and then He quoted a text out of Hosea, showing that our Lord expects us to go below the surface and get at the inner spiritual meaning of Scripture for ourselves. "If ye had known what that meaneth, ye would not have done so and so." Yes, if we but knew

what the Scriptures *mean*, it would save us from many a mistake. McCheyne in his "Letter to a Boy" says: "You read your Bible regularly of course, but do try to *understand* it, and still more to *feel* it. Turn the Bible into prayer."

3. Let us read with *meditation*. The Bible is not a book for the hasty or surface reader. It cannot be read on the run. These Divine oracles will not deliver up their secret to those who skim them as the swallow touches the brook with its wing. The mind requires to settle down on what is read and linger upon it as the bee does upon the flower, till the nutritive virtue is extracted from the Word. No doubt many passages have their wealth lying on the surface and easily gathered like the manna in the wilderness, but in the case of others it is like "treasure hid in a field" which we must needs dig for if we would find. Indeed, if we would enter into the gold mines of revelation and work its richest veins, we must be prepared to do some deep boring in spots. The Author of Scripture has not so written it that the meaning of it shall always be easily within our reach. On the contrary, He has so put it that we have to *think* our way into it. Not that He would conceal the meaning from the diligent, but that He would strengthen the faculties and educate

the soul by compelling the human mind to be active and alert in its attempts to decipher the teaching of the Divine mind. It has been said that "it is impossible to appreciate an athletic literature without some degree of the strain of a mental athlete in the study of it." Now the Bible is pre-eminently an athletic literature, and we need not expect to study it even for the purposes of devotion without some mental effort and exertion. The bread of life for the soul has not seldom to be earned by the sweat of our mind, just as the daily bread for the body has to be earned by the sweat of our brow.

4. Let us read with *appropriation* and *self-application.* The truth of the Bible, if it is to have any efficacy, must be used and applied. Its contents will only interest and benefit us in proportion as we discover that we have a part and lot in them. When it speaks of our being adopted, justified, sanctified, let me realise that these blessings are for me. When it speaks of the work of Christ and the benefits that flow from it, let me believe that the word was written for me, and make it my very own. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord"; it is a summons to a conference to whiten scarlet sin; let me listen to it as a call to my own soul in particular. When any virtue is commanded,

let me hearken to the command as addressed personally to *me ;* and when any vice is forbidden, let me take the prohibition as meant for *me.* Happy the reader who can thus make clear his title to the goodly estate given us in the Word, and who exerts himself to occupy every inch of the soil, and to appropriate every ounce of the treasure.

5. Let us *treasure up the Word in our memories and practise it in our lives.* It is well to do with the words of Holy Writ what Mary did with the words of the angel—" she kept all these sayings and pondered them in her heart." " Thy word have I hid in my heart," says the psalmist, " that I might not sin against Thee." Let us imitate David in this laying up of the Word in the storehouses of memory and affection so as to have it ready for use as a preservative against sin. If we keep the Word, the Word will keep us. " I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God *abideth* in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one " (1 John ii. 14). It is the Word of God abiding in us that makes us strong to vanquish evil, and enables us to lead the overcoming life. And what is it to have the Word of God abiding in us ? Something very different from reading a verse or two before we go out to our work and

forgetting all about it as the day goes on. It means having the words of Scripture lodged in our inmost selves, our thoughts saturated with them, that by patient meditation upon them, and continual recurrence to them, our character may be moulded by them, and our conduct controlled. Writing to the Thessalonians, the apostle speaks of the Word as "working effectually in them that believe" (1 Thess. ii. 13). We ought to give the Word free course to "work effectually" in us. Let it operate on our nature, let it search us and reveal us to ourselves, let it chide us, reform us, allure us, purify us, mould us. Instead of sitting in judgment on it, let it sit in judgment on us. Instead of revising and correcting it, let it revise and correct us. Let us choose the path it maps out for us instead of following our own inclinations. Let its doctrines instruct us, let its precepts guide us, let its motives animate us, let its prospects of immortality beckon us and draw us on towards the golden gate. In a word, let the great purposes for which God gave us the Book be achieved in us.

A proper and realising view of these considerations ought to lead us to a larger use of the Word of God in the development of our religious life. If God has given it to help us, we ought

so to utilise and apply it as to make it helpful. The Bible ought to be our daily companion, the man of our counsel. No morning should pass without a daily portion of Scripture being read, and some one verse or clause fixed upon as a word for the day. Carried in the memory and revolved in the thoughts, it will help to make the life of the day more hallowed, more radiant, more victorious, more beneficent. If we but plied our Bible more, our profiting would appear both to ourselves and to all men ; it would appear in the increasing depth and spirituality, in the growing experimentalness and perennial freshness of our Christian life. Habitual contact and converse with the Word will do for us what John Ruskin says it did for him—it will "establish our soul in life." If we are weary, it will refresh us ; if we are weak, it will be as a staff to lean upon ; if we are doubtful of our way, it will be as a lantern to our path ; if we are assailed, it will put weapons in our hand ; if we go astray, it will restore us ; if we be in displeasure with God, it is the word of reconciliation ; if we would save our soul, the engrafted word is able to do it. The sainted James Hervey declared that were he to enjoy Hezekiah's grant and have fifteen years added to his life, he would devote more attention to the Scriptures, and give them

more copious and frequent perusal. Do but remember that, lightly as we sometimes regard the Word and little store as we set by it, we shall one day find more comfort in it than in all the world. When we lie upon our last bed, waiting for the rending of the veil, one word of assurance from this Book will outweigh in value all the words of man. To some passage of it we shall turn as that whereon we first cast anchor. To some remembered promise of it, recalled with a last effort of consciousness, we shall cling to keep our head above water in the swellings of Jordan. "I always loved the study of the Word," said the dying Halyburton, "and I have found it sweet to the last."

Use of other Books

There are books very happily named "next-to-the-Bible books," which are among the choicest possessions God has given us, to the use of which we owe our sanctification in no small measure. As a help to the life of inward devotion they are invaluable. They bring us into the society of some of the wisest and saintliest souls who have ever lived, who give us of their most precious thoughts, who take us into the confidences of their inner life, and share with us their spiritual

experience. Without travelling so far as Endor, we can call up from the dead some of the choicest spirits who have ever tabernacled on earth to be our counsellors and guides in the affairs of the soul. They open their hearts to us in blessed familiarity, and talk to us, teach us, comfort us: they lead us into a fuller understanding of the divine Word; they make the way of Gospel salvation clearer; they discover to us the workings of our own hearts; they lay bare the stratagems of the enemy of souls; they map out for us the turns and windings of Christian experience; they solve for us the many doubts and difficulties that beset our path; they weaken sin, strengthen grace, enforce truth, confirm principle, and teach us how to walk with God. The inscription over the doorway of the great library in ancient Thebes—"medicine for the soul"—is specially applicable to these godly books, these spiritual classics. For they can heal the soul of most of its ailments: they can relieve its weakness, rest its weariness, warm its coldness, freshen its dulness, give new life to its deadness. No one really desirous of making headway in his pilgrim journey to heaven but should plan for a little library of these inward, devout, mystical books of the soul:—À Kempis's "Imitation of Christ," Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Grace

Abounding," Rutherford's "Letters," Baxter's "Saint's Rest," Howe's "Blessedness of the Righteous," Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," William Guthrie's "Christian's Great Interest," Halyburton's "Memoirs," John Newton's "Cardiphonia," Law's "Serious Call," John Owen on "Indwelling Sin" and on "Spiritualmindedness," Edwards's "Religious Affections," Marshall on "Sanctification," the "Private Devotions" of Bishop Andrewes, "Works of Dora Greenwell," Andrew Bonar's "Diary," Horatius Bonar's "God's Way of Peace" and "God's Way of Holiness," Goulburn's "Personal Religion," Dr. Whyte's "Fraser of Brea" and "Thomas Shepard, Founder of Harvard," Phelp's "Still Hour," Matheson's "My Aspirations" and "Moments on the Mount," Tilestone's "Great Souls at Prayer," A. J. Gordon's "Twofold Life," Knight's "In the Secret of His Presence," Smellie's "Hour of Silence," Miller's "Message for the Day." What direction and impetus we receive from books like these towards a higher being and doing! Let us but give them their proper opportunity, and out of the feeblest and most fainting among us they will make assured and sanctified Christian believers. Not infrequently it is a moment big with destiny, and marking nothing short of a

new epoch in our soul history, when we happen to open with receptive mind one of these volumes. The reading of Law's "Serious Call" by John Wesley when a young student at Oxford opened up his way to become the greatest of evangelists. Dr. John Brown says in a letter to a friend: "I read the "Excursion" when I was eighteen years of age, and I have been a different man ever since." To turn over the pages of one of these godly books and let its saintly writer speak to us, reason with us, persuade us, will not seldom make a different man of one, will refashion his nature, and bring him to live in a new world. What reader of them has not had repeated in himself a thousand times the experience of Thomas Boston: "I plied my books. After earnestly plying my books I felt my heart begin to grow better." Let us ply our good books more diligently till, like Boston, we feel our hearts begin to grow better. We should make daily companions of them. Some of them should be constantly in our hand. It would be well if a row of that class of books that someone has happily characterised as "bedside favourites" were always within easy reach. Daily converse with these classics of eternity would help us to live our Christian life more intelligently, more strongly, more brightly. It would be nothing

short of the fertilisation of our soul far down in those very depths of our being where the root of the matter is rooting itself more deeply and firmly every day. Victor Hugo's saying is pregnant with a truth which ought to strike home to many of us: "It is just those books which a man does *not* read which constitute the strongest evidence against him." It is not to the credit of a Christian man if he does *not* read these godly books we have been commending; it is greatly to the detriment of his religious life if he do not read them; and in the last reckoning it will surely constitute strong evidence against him—evidence that he had little or no appreciation for the products of those saintly spirits who have caught a clearer sight than others of the Heavenly Vision and heard more distinctly the Divine Voices; evidence that he neglected to avail himself of one of the most valuable aids to the working out of his own salvation which God had made accessible to him. As we would not have such damaging evidence to be tabled against us at the last, it behoves us to see to it that our outlay on the secular and often trashy literature with which our bookshelves are stocked be less out of all proportion to what we expend on these books of the inner life, and to see to it also that, having procured them, we proceed to absorb and

assimilate their spirit and contents till they become

> " Part of our life's unalterable good,
> Of all our saintlier aspiration."

Let us make friends and favourites of them, with whom we shall live in daily intimacy. Blessed is that servant who when his Lord cometh shall be found with some one or other of them in his hand!

Self-Examination

To examine ourselves is to turn our attention inwards and make inquiry into the marks and features of our personal Christianity. It is a survey of our inner life, a calling of ourselves to account, a looking within to see what is good in us and what is ill, what is true and what is fallacious, what is real and what is only seeming. The duty is frequently inculcated in Scripture as an important part of the Christian discipline. The misfortune is that the process of self-examination has so often been unwisely conducted, and in many instances has degenerated into a species of morbid self-scrutiny, which has been attended with very melancholy results. It is painful to think of the tortures which many a sincere but misguided soul has inflicted on itself. Particularly when the conscience is sensitive and

scrupulous, a vast amount of needless suffering has been entailed by persistent brooding over self, and the disheartening discoveries arising from the inward survey of one's own heart. The constant fingering of one's own pulse, and diagnosing of one's own symptoms, is at variance with true healthfulness.

But the misdirections and abuses of a duty afford no good reason for its neglect. When all is said, there is a self-acquaintance which is not to be dispensed with. No more fatal mistake can be made than to live carelessly and at random, without test or scrutiny, with no calling oneself to account, taking our religion for granted, and presuming that all is well when in reality we may be deceiving ourselves. "At the last tribunal," writes John Foster, "no one will ever regret having been an habitual and rigorous judge of self. It is an unhappy and enormous fault to live on amid uncertainties respecting the state of one's mind, and with occasional eclipses of the delightful hopes which shine from the other world. I must therefore assemble all my convictions around me and settle the great account I have with God."

We ought from time to time to look within and take account of our spiritual condition for the following reasons :—

1. *It is possible to be mistaken concerning our state*, and mistakes here may lead to such terrible consequences. In matters of the soul we should run no risks. Many have drifted into spiritual bankruptcy and ruin just because they would not take time to examine themselves. Only by self-examination can we detect the sophistries by which we are apt to impose upon ourselves. Only thus can we sift the chaff from the wheat, or distinguish between the pure gold and the dross that mingles with it.

2. *The speediest way to end our doubts and fears is by self-examination.* What a delightful discovery it will be, if, having often doubted whether we were in a gracious state, we find, on investigation, that we have more grace than we suspected; if, having often feared that we had no interest in Christ, we are led, after honest inquiry, to conclude that beyond question Christ is ours and we are His; if, having thought that we had lost our Roll of Assurance, we discover to our unspeakable surprise and relief, on thrusting our hand into our bosom, that it is still there! Dr. Andrew Bonar tells us in his "Diary" that he was first led to hope that he was really in Christ by discovering in himself the marks and characteristics of being in a state of grace which Guthrie lays down in his "Saving Interest."

After a prayerful reading of that little book he came to the conclusion that all the marks of faith given therein were to be found in him, although some of them were very feeble. "This," said he, "is the first beam of joy that I have yet found in regard to my state."

3. *This duty improves all other duties, and improves ourselves.* For example, we cannot make a worthy approach to the Lord's Table unless we prepare ourselves thereto by self-examination. And so with regard to all those duties in which we have more specially to draw near to God; the soul must not appear before Him in undress—we must put on our best attire, and see that nothing be offensive. "*Prepare* to meet thy God, O Israel." Not only so, self-examination improves ourselves by helping us to discover sin and get clear of it, by making us more watchful and more holy, by removing hindrances to our growth in grace, and bringing us into a better frame for duty.

4. *If we often cite ourselves before the tribunal of our own conscience and judge ourselves, we shall not be judged of God at the last.* "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged" (1 Cor. xi. 31). If we try ourselves in the lower court, and pass sentence on ourselves, we shall not be condemned in the Higher Court hereafter. Self-judgment

prevents a further judgment. The more we search and censure ourselves now, the less we shall have to do it when we come to die, and the less exposed we shall be to an adverse verdict on the great day of accounts. We shall all be weighed in the balances at last; if we often weighed ourselves now as we go along, we should be less likely to be found wanting in the final estimate.

We proceed to a few directions as to the right management of this duty:

1. *We must be careful not to make it more a quest for the evil that is in us than a quest for the good.* Let us not look only for things that dishearten, but also for things that are gracious and favourable. We should be on the watch for manifestations of the indwelling Christ as well as for manifestations of indwelling sin. It is only right that we deal fairly by ourselves, taking into account evidence that tells in our favour as well as that which tells the other way. "We must have two eyes, one to see our imperfections, the other to see what is good." If it be a breach of the commandment to bear false witness against our neighbour, it is equally so to bear false witness against ourselves.

2. *In forming our judgment we ought to be guided more by the general bent and tenor of the*

life than by isolated thoughts or actions. It is not so much where we *stand* at any given moment that matters as the *direction* in which we are moving. The question is what is our habitual course, what is the set and bias of our character and walk, what is our settled tendency?

3. *We must give due allowance to the fact that there may be grace in the heart which is not just in evidence or exercise at the time.* There is so little of it, it may be, that it may escape your notice, but it escapes not the notice of the more searching and discerning eye of Christ. There may be operations of the Spirit going on within us that have not yet reported themselves to consciousness. Oftentimes when the fire seems to have died out on the hearth there will be fire still smouldering among the ashes. We may be living epistles of Christ though the writing be somewhat blurred and illegible. We require to be of a discerning spirit, and have our senses exercised, lest we infer that because there is some corruption in us we have no grace, or write ourselves down as not the children of God when we really are so.

4. *It is well in the course of our self-inspection frequently to lift our eyes off from self altogether and turn our gaze Christwards.* Looking unto Jesus is a more healthful posture than looking into self. So if in the course of our self-examina-

tion we make painful discoveries in ourselves of failure and sinfulness, we can but turn to Christ, in whom we shall make glorious discoveries of mercy, and righteousness, and peace, which will reassure our trembling spirit and bid us to take heart and hope. "It is not in our own wounds we must put our hands," said Vinet, "but in the wounds of Christ." If our own heart condemn us, we must go to God for pardon. We must fly from our own censures to Heaven's mercy. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father." Self-examination that does not drive us for healing to the Great Physician, however earnest and severe it may seem to be, misses its true object, and is but a distraction.

Christian Fellowship

One other help to the religious life remains to be spoken of—*association with the Christian community*. We cannot afford to live in detachment from our fellow-Christians. We cannot shut ourselves off in the spirit of a narrow individualism, as so many atoms or units, from the great Christian brotherhood to which we belong. We are formed for society; we need each other's presence for criticism, for culture, for discipline, for edification. The Lord has made us dependent on each other.

Every life waits for some other life to supplement and influence it. Our attainments are not put to their right use till they supply the deficiencies of others, and on the other hand our infirmities and defects are meant to draw us into association with stronger brethren from whom we may receive help and direction. The sheep of Christ are gregarious in their instinct and, like other sheep, gather in flocks. The Bible insists throughout on the necessity for fellowship, conference, common worship, mutual counsel and consultation. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Eccl. iv. 9). "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). "And let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. x. 24—25). If we are concerned for our spiritual welfare we shall avoid the "exclusive" brethren, and cast in our lot with the communicating brethren, whose fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, and with all the saints.

We shall be glad to meet with those who are travelling the same road, participating in the same hopes and fears, and looking forward to the same great change, to be heartened by their admonitions, to exchange experiences, to compare notes, to unite in prayer, and to take sweet counsel together. Thus, if we have fallen, some friend will help us to our feet again ; if our hearts are grown cold, Christian fellowship will kindle them ; if we have become backward and remiss, we shall provoke one another to love and to good works ; if we are wavering, we shall be steadied into constancy and perseverance. And so the famous passage in Malachi will re-enact itself : " Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another ; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." Such communings, whether they be in the nature of Sabbath assemblages or weeknight prayer-meetings, or roadside interviews, or Higher Life conferences, cannot but prove an instrument of religious inspiration and progress. As we speak to each other encouragingly in the language of Canaan, we shall be incited to holy duty, we shall be cured of our

languors and declensions, faith will be increased, and love will be preserved from waxing cold when iniquity abounds. "Time was," says Mr. Spurgeon, "when they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and that was the best of times. Let us hold mutual discourse upon our experiences, make pleasant exchange of our knowledge, and aid each other by our gifts."

CHAPTER IX

ITS ASPIRATIONS

" Of all the myriad moods of mind
That through the soul come thronging,
Which one was e'er so dear, so kind,
So beautiful as longing ? "

" It is the number and kind of his aspirations that determine a man's place in the scale of manhood."—NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS.

" The ideal Christian life is one of insatiable longing, never pausing in any arbour of spiritual content, but ever wooed on by visions of new joys and attainments."—J. R. MILLER.

IN the newborn soul appetites and desires are kindled to which it was a stranger before, and which the worldly man does not understand. The renewed heart becomes full to the brim of devout longings and aspirations, hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, ambitions after spiritual excellence, reachings forth after the heavenly and the Divine. In these the inner life finds outlet and expression. They may be regarded as the gushings and bubblings of that " well of living water " which the Saviour says

shall be "in us springing up to everlasting life." Apart altogether from the actual attainments in the Christian life we may have reached, or the measure of progress we may be able to register, the appetencies and desires we discover in ourselves are of immense significance. They are symptomatic of a right spiritual condition. Indeed, we might say with Dr. Alexander MacLaren that these yearnings after unaccomplished perfection are the very signature of the Christian life. From them we may infer much regarding our true character, may forecast our future, and draw favourable conclusions as to our eternal prospects. Dr. Chalmers, at the close of a long life filled with manifold toil and eminent for usefulness, declared that his attainments might be all summed up in the one word "*desirousness*." The word is most expressive, and the state of mind it describes is one to be envied. They who are truly *desirous* of moral excellence, of increasing conformity to the likeness of Christ, of greater nearness to God, and more meetness for heaven, are already well advanced in their sanctification.

Desire may be defined as the state of tension created by the contrast between the present condition of self and some future and preferable condition not yet realised. It is the perception

of the congeniality of some object with our own nature, and the direction of our thought towards it, because of the enhancement it would bring to our being. It is the soul laying itself open to the good, and feeling the allurement of it. Aspiration is the forward reach of the soul, the stretching of the faculties to something as yet beyond our grasp. So long, therefore, as there are better things ahead of us, so long as there is a region of the unattained to be possessed, or a realm of the yet-beyond to be explored, we cannot stay complacently where we are in our religious life. Instead of "resting upon our laurels," as the phrase is, we shall become candidates for fresh ones by pushing on to new conquests. We shall go out after larger measures of grace, and long to know more, to experience more, to enjoy more. We should take it as a sad sign of reaction and decline, should we begin to desire less, to pray less, to aspire less. Hence we can readily understand how it is that the Scriptures place such emphasis and value on a desirous and aspiring state of soul. "One thing have I *desired* of the Lord, that will I seek after." "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so *panteth* my soul after Thee, O God." "With my soul have I *desired* Thee in the night." "Blessed are they who *hunger* and *thirst* after righteousness." "He

satisfieth the *longing* soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

If we are so happy as to find ourselves in the state of holy *desirousness* we have thus endeavoured to describe, we may indeed be congratulated, for we are in a most hopeful and promising condition.

1. The presence of these longings and aspirations is an evidence that we are *spiritually alive.* They constitute a living experience. There was a time when we felt no such longings, but that was the time when we were dead in trespasses and sins, the time when we were sunk in sodden contentment with such husks as the world could offer us. There are no cravings in the house of the dead. There are no desires in the grave. If to-day we are crying after God, even the living God, if we are earnestly longing after truth and goodness, if we are lifting up our head to higher things and nobler possibilities, we want no further proof that we are a living soul. These are the breathings and stirrings of the Divine life within us. They may indeed be feeble, but they are an index at least that we are alive unto God.

2. They are a *proof that God is at work in our soul.* Whence come these devout longings, these pantings after truth and goodness? They do not originate in ourselves. Such rare plants are not

native to the soil of human nature. They are exotics from Paradise. They spring from seeds sown in our hearts by the hand of the great Husbandman Himself. Let us take courage then. If God is at work in us, what results may we not anticipate? The great Potter has us on His wheel, and albeit we are very poor material, He can fashion us into vessels of glory. The process may be painful, but He will not stay His hand till He completes it. With God there are no unfinished projects, no abandoned purposes, no monuments of failure.

3. They are a *revelation of character.* There is no surer test of what a man really is than the longings which he cherishes deep down in his heart. Why do we fix our desires on certain objects? Is it not because we think them of worth to us, and their realisation yields us satisfaction? Why do we direct our wishes toward certain things, but because they interest us, and are agreeable to our tastes and preferences? Hence our character is reflected in our desires. In the work of self-examination, therefore, we cannot do better than to make searching inquiry into the nature and quality of our desires—what it is they are most urgent for, and what it is that most satisfies them. We may not be what we should be, nor what we might be; but how about

what we aspire to be? Do we sigh to be good and to do good? Do we long for rightness with God and similarity of feeling with Him, for love of His Word, and fellowship with His Son? If we do, we have the best grounds for concluding that our disposition is essentially right, and that the whole stream of our being is setting steadily towards God and Heaven.

4. They are an *evidence of growth in grace.* It surely indicates no inconsiderable advance when, in place of indifference and unconcern about spiritual things, we are conscious of holy appetency, lively desire, and fervent longing. It was a saying of Calvin, "The greatest part of holiness is the desire to be holy." We have already made good progress in the life of godliness, if we have an admiration for godliness, and an aspiration after it that finds expression in such yearnings as "Nearer my God to Thee," "More love to Thee, O Christ." If we have an earnest desire to do what is right, we may take it that we are right in heart already. If we "covet earnestly" the best gifts, we have already begun to acquire them. If we have an irrepressible longing to be made meet for Heaven, our meetness is already well advanced. What if the poet is even justified in his conjecture—

> "Perhaps the longing to be so
> Helps make the soul immortal?"

5. They are a *prophecy and a pledge of what we shall yet become.* As a general rule, and other things being equal, one eventually attains what he ardently desires and passionately longs for. Children come to be in after years what they have set their hearts upon when young: their youthful tastes and pursuits have been prophetic, so that one could easily form a forecast of their future. The consuming wish, the fervent longing, go to the shaping of character, and give the life its bent. Desires and aspirations are the shadows of coming events, the tokens of good things to come. To long for goodness is in some imperfect and incipient measure to possess the good we long for. We shall come to be holy if, like Robert Murray McCheyne, we long to be "holy as a pardoned sinner can be made." We shall yet overtake our ideals, if we pant after them, and long to come up with them. May we not even say with the poet—

> "The thing we long for that we are
> For one transcendent moment"?

And eventually "the thing we long for," that like some white bird has flown so high above us and so far in front of us, we shall come up with and hold in our hands in permanent possession and enjoyment. There is before us a world

where all striving and aspiration shall receive their fulfilment, reaching the horizon where earth and heaven meet.

6. They *foreshadow answers to prayer.* When God means to bestow a blessing upon us He first sets us longing for it. That longing is inspired by Himself, and therefore He will be sure to gratify it. God is not so cruel or unkind as to dangle His blessings before us, and set us hankering after them, and then draw them away from us and refuse to let us taste them. He does not so mock and tantalise the children of men. So far from that, His Word abounds in such promises as these: "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him"; "The desire of the righteous shall be granted"; "Delight thyself in God and He will give thee the desires of thine heart"; "He satisfieth the longing soul." What then at this time is your most urgent desire—what your most importunate craving? Is it for a larger growth? Is it to wear more of the image of the heavenly? Is it to enter more fully into the inheritance of all them that are sanctified? Is it to be less faltering, fearing, failing, in what remains of your earthly sojourn, and to lead a richer, freer, more victorious life? If your heart sighs and pines after these things as the sick man longs for the morning light, or the traveller

trudging across the burning sands longs for the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, your desires shall one day be blessedly realised, for when God creates a craving He provides for its satisfaction. He will do unto us according to the promptings and aspirations which He has Himself excited within us. If we can only get as far as Samuel Rutherford when he had to confess " all my stock of Christ at present is but some hunger for Him," we shall soon have reason to sing with the Virgin, " He filleth the hungry with good things. My soul doth magnify the Lord."

Desires and aspirations do not in themselves amount to attainment, nor are they the highest God has to give. They are but forms of unrest, and from their very nature are attended with more or less pain and discomfort. Nevertheless, we have good reason, as we have seen, to be grateful for their presence. They are precious in themselves, and still more precious because of what they lead on to. Do they not make us feel the emptiness of our nature, and the folly of seeking supplies from any earth-born source? Do they not drive us to God as the only Being who can satisfy the cravings of an immortal spirit? Do they not make Christ precious, and incline us to run our pipe up from all earthly

cisterns to the fountain of life in Him? That being so, we shall be well advised if we concentrate more attention on our desires. Let us never suffer them to become dormant, and still less to die away out of the soul. Let us be careful to direct them on such objects as are calculated to excite them and draw them forth. If at times they grow cold within us, let us heap on more fuel, and cry to Him who doth not quench the smoking flax to fan them into more vehement flame. Let us join Rutherford in his prayer "that the Lord would take my desires and add a thousandfold more unto them, that He would sow spiritual inclinations upon them, that they might be higher and deeper, longer and broader." And, in the same connection, we might with advantage recall how in Bunyan's great allegory Mr. Desires-Awake exerted such influence for good in the town of Mansoul, how constantly he waited on the Prince, how prevailing he was in his prayers, and how often the city owed its deliverance to him. Not seldom the Prince would come forth from His pavilion to meet him, and would Himself say to him: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see," and would send

him home laden with gifts. Not one of us who may not by God's grace resemble Mr. Desires-Awake, if we will only study how he kept his desires from going to sleep, and what it was that he set them upon.

At this point it is needful to interject a word of practical counsel. We must remember that our yearnings, no matter how heavenly, if they end in yearnings only, will not advance us much to the goal. We do not reach the stature of full-grown Christians by merely wishing for it. Our aspirations must not be suffered to degenerate into religious sentimentality. They must get themselves translated into holy endeavour, and draw the whole life after them. Joan of Arc was once asked why her white banner was so constantly victorious, and her answer was, "Because I send it on boldly in front of me and then I follow it myself." It is well to have our longings, and desires, and outreachings of soul, and to send them on boldly in front of us, but we must be sure to follow them ourselves, and throw after them the whole energies of our life, if they are ever to take on reality, or issue in accomplishment. Our motto must be that of the apostle: "I follow after."

Finally, it is to be noted that our aspirations not only witness to the fact that "God is a

rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," but carry with them to the possessor of them authentic proofs of immortality. They point onward to their own perpetuity and perfecting. They are among the things that " stay not behind nor in the grave are trod." They are not destined to " sink," as Carlyle would say, " in these swamps amid the dance of dying dreams." To a soul that has cherished and lived upon them nothing would seem more impossible than that anything so trifling as the mere stoppage of the breath should stifle or put an end to them. Does not their very presence within us cause us to feel at times

> " Through all this fleshly dress
> Some shoots of everlastingness " ?

Do they not prophesy to us of a world where there shall be no longer sighings, pinings, yearnings and aspirings, but only possessings, and enjoyings, realisings, and delightings in God, where failure, shortcoming, and deficiency shall all have given place to satisfaction, completeness, and rest. That which here we have longed for, prayed for, and lived for—there we shall find it all. " I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."

CHAPTER X

ITS MOODS AND FRAMES

"What untunes me is as bad as what cripples or stuns me."—EMERSON.

"One thinks he is a Christian because he is joyful. Another thinks he is not a Christian because he is sad. But both may be Christians."—BEECHER.

"Your heart is not the compass Christ saileth by."—RUTHERFORD.

THE inner life is marked by extreme variability. It has its ebbs and its flows, its downcastings and its upliftings, its despondencies and its exaltations, its languors and its revivings. The weather within is changeable as the weather without. There is no limit to the variation in our states of soul. To-day we feel dull and cold and dead: to-morrow we are full of life; now bathed in sunshine, now wrapped in gloom; now dancing before the ark like David, and anon like that same David crying from the depths. There are times when we can scarce move or stir, and there are other times when, ere ever we are aware, our soul is borne swiftly onward like the chariots of Amminadib. There are seasons when we seem

to be frozen, but again there sets in a gracious thaw, that melts the ice, and causes the living waters to flow as aforetime. Our ideal may be to be unfailingly steadfast and cheerful, energetic and persevering, but at times we are just the opposite of all these. How many different moods we may be in in the course of a year, or even in the course of a single day!

There is no need to be discouraged on account of these sudden changes and alternations. Exemption from them would not be desirable. If we did not have them, it would only be an evidence that we were destitute of life. If we were marble statues, we might stand all the year round in rigid propriety and be unaffected by any moods or feelings. If we were made of cast iron, we should know no spells of dulness, no interludes either of languor or buoyancy, no times of lifting up or casting down. If we were automata, we could be always wound up and discharge our functions in the same monotonous and unvarying manner. But because we are living souls, we are subject to change, and liable to all the feelings and fluctuations that are connected with life and incidental to it. Because the heart of flesh has taken the place of the heart of stone, we are delicately sensitive, and readily respond to the influences that play upon us. If

our religion be indeed a living thing, we cannot but be subject to all sorts of temporary frames, and passing moods, and states of soul variable as an April day ; we are bound to know something of the tidal movements of the spirit, of hours of visitation and hours of gloom, of moments of elevation and moments of eclipse, of hopefulness and dejection, of faith and fearfulness.

Our moods are the most incalculable part of us. A man's mood has been defined as his " mental weather " ; and there is nothing more uncertain than weather, nothing more beyond our control. Yet the mood plays a very important part in our lives. We have hardly yet properly estimated the power of the mood. All kinds of workers are conscious at times of moments in which they awake to uncommon facility and excellence, moments in which the conditions are specially favourable for the fulfilment of their task, moments in which they are visited with an insight, an expertness, a power of hitting the mark, to which in less prosperous seasons they are utter strangers. The artist knows what it is to stand before his easel at times torpid and unproductive ; but perhaps next day, after a mountain climb, or a drive through some lovely landscape, he will enter his studio and scarcely be able to use his brush and pigments fast enough

to picture forth the teeming creations of his brain. The author will often move along in the slow agonies of composition as labouredly as Pharaoh's chariot ; but now and again, when he is in the mood, thoughts and words will flock to him like angels, and he has only just to open his windows to take them in. The poet of all men will be readiest to join in George Herbert's confession—

> " It is not every day that I
> Fitted am to prophesy."

But occasionally there will come to him a clarity of vision, an interpretative insight, an exaltation of feeling, an influx of power, which will lift him into masterly achievement. Fortunately moods like these are by no means confined to art or literature. The children of God are no strangers to a like experience. To them also are accorded luminous hours, when they take wing, as it were, and transcend their wonted level. They are lifted into highmindedness and holy feeling ; they experience a glow and gleam ; a sense of the true, the good, the beautiful asserts itself as it never did before ; they have the world beneath their feet, and live under an opening heaven. They are conscious of new spiritual quickening and uplift. It is a gracious visitation.

Our duty at such times is clear. We should seek to prolong the higher mood. "What a pity it is," says good Matthew Henry, "that we are not in as good a frame always as we are in sometimes!" Be it ours to fix, and if possible perpetuate, our good frames. Let us retain the glow and gleam beyond the passing moment. It is a pity such rare experiences should be like the morning cloud and the early dew that so soon vanish away. Let us give them what permanence we can. But that is not enough. We should be careful to take advantage of them and turn them to practical account, as the miller does with the stream that turns his mill, or the sailor with the favouring breeze that helps to swell his canvas. These tides of the spirit, if utilised, may float us on to better things. Emerson illustrates this in one of his essays by a reference to the old fable of Sir Tristram in "Morte d'Arthur," who received from the fairy an enchantment of six hours of growing strength every day, and was prudent enough always to fight during the magic hours in which his strength was on the increase, since from noonday on till evening his strength gradually diminished—the moral being that moments of inspiration, hours of exalted mood, intervals of heightened power and excellence, should be carefully husbanded and promptly

availed of. Such visitations and enchantments are from their very nature shortlived, and may not repeat themselves except at long intervals —all the more reason that we should not let them slip by us unused and unimproved. Whatever gains they bring, let us be prompt to seize, economise, and perpetuate. They may lead to heightened resolve, to increased spirituality, to nobler endeavour, to worthier living; they may give an impetus to all that is best in us; they may accelerate our pace on the way to the life everlasting. When James Fraser, of Brea, felt any helpful influence springing up in his Christian course, or any fresh impulse from on high, when any favouring breeze arose that enabled him to make more headway in his voyage to heaven, he tells us "I set up another sail." So with us in our better moods and frames. When in our hour of prayer, or in our times of Bible-reading and devout retirement, when musing in silence, or stirred by the moving appeal of the preacher, a heavenly breeze begins to blow, let us hoist "another sail," and the Divine afflatus will propel us swiftly onward to the haven whither we would be.

It is in these finer moods and phases that we are at our best. We shall find it advantageous, therefore, to avail ourselves of the opportunity

they afford to revise our life estimates, to readjust our standards, to map out the course of duty, and take our reckonings for the future. We get clearer views, and a truer perspective, when we are on the hill-top than when we are creeping along the low-lying valley ; and it is surely when we are on the mountain that we should take our landmarks, and not when we have gone down into the plain and lost sight of them. " We sometimes speak of getting from some eminence ' a bird's-eye view ' of things, but from the altitudes of some heightened mood, or exalted frame of mind, we get ' a God's-eye view ' of everything, and it is marvellous how that alters the proportion of things, and what a reversal of estimates it leads to." It is in the luminous hours of elevation and insight, when our best impulses are in the ascendant, when God's presence is felt like a sensation, and we have " thoughts that into glory peep," that the soul should bring in its verdict on those great and solemn issues on which it is called to adjudicate. At these rare and happy junctures when we have " erected ourselves above ourselves," when there has been a certain freshening of conscience and purifying of motive, we cannot do better than take advantage of them to fix our duties, to determine our courses of conduct, and decide

our attitude of mind. "God has so arranged the chronometry of our spirits," says James Martineau, "that there shall be thousands of silent moments between the striking hours." Now it is in the "striking" hours of the spirit that we should make our great decisions and resolves, that we should settle all doubtful points and questions of procedure, that we should ask ourselves what our aims and ideals should be, and how generally we ought to comport ourselves in this probationary scene. We lose many precious gains of the spiritual life by not being prompt to take ourselves at our best.

But what about our *evil* moods? There is no need that we should continue in them. It is a matter of religious experience that they can be combated and withstood to a much greater extent than is commonly supposed. "Our moods," it has been said, "are the least explored and the least subjugated of the soul's wide territories." That may be, still subjection to them is not inevitable. If it were, we might indeed despair. Powerful as their influence often is, it is not omnipotent. If they act upon our thought, our thought can in turn react upon them. Moreover, the will may be brought to bear upon them, and effectively too. We are not so entirely at their mercy that we are compelled to consent

to them, or passively acquiesce in them. We can upbraid ourselves for entertaining them, and chide ourselves out of them. We can remove the causes of them. We can create conditions that will induce better moods. "The mood is moveable," says a modern essayist, "often so easily moveable. A child's prattle may do it, or a strain of music. Saul knew that when in his hour of depression he called in David and his harp." Religious biography has no more valuable lesson than when it teaches us how saintly men and women have risen out of their bad mental states, have struggled against their perverse and inferior moods, and been more than conquerors.

There is a real danger lest the stress of the spiritual life should be thrown on moods. We may be thankful every day of our lives that the Gospel of Christ has given us something more stable to rely upon. Moods are proverbially changeful and uncertain; they are impalpable and fugitive. Blessed be God we rest not on coming and going moods, on passing frames of mind, but on something outside us that remains the same—the Person, the work, the love of Christ, the sure word of promise on which He has caused us to hope. Amid all the ups and downs of experience, the ebbs and flows of

feeling, in times of deadness when our hearts are cold and unresponsive, the death of Christ in which we trust abides valid and efficacious. Whether in dark seasons, or in privileged hours, the basis of our acceptance with God continues unaffected. All our exaltations do not exalt it, nor do all our despondencies depress it. The groundwork standeth sure whatever may be the changes of climate or atmosphere. "I also saw," says John Bunyan, "that it was not my good frame of heart that made my Righteousness better, nor my bad frame of heart that made my Righteousness worse: for my Righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." However variable our feelings toward Christ may be, He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself. "If Christ's thoughts of my salvation," said Samuel Rutherford, "were as changeable as my thoughts, I should indeed be at a sad loss." In the matter of frames and feelings we may be as unstable as Reuben without any imperilling of our security. If we could but realise it, we are just as truly saved when languishing in the dungeon of despair as when by faith we soar to the top of Pisgah and view the landscape o'er, when crying "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him," as when feasting in the banqueting-house with His banner of love over

us. There is ever a distinction to be made between faith and feeling, grace and comfort; they do not always coexist, and when they do, the degree of the one is not always the just measure of the other. Our conviction of Christ's preciousness may be always the same, but our realisation of it may vary. Our love to Christ may be rooted and grounded in our hearts, but it is not always equally in exercise, nor is our sense of it equally vivid. "Were we always alike," writes John Newton to one of his correspondents, "could we always believe, love, rejoice, we should think the power inherent and our own; but it is more for the Lord's glory, and more suited to form us to a temper becoming the Gospel, that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence than that we should be always in a lively frame. A soul may be in as thriving a state when thirsting, seeking, and mourning after the Lord as when actually rejoicing in Him; as much in earnest when fighting in the valley as when singing on the mount; nay, dark seasons afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the word of promise, to maintain hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty when we have but little comfort, is a much more certain evidence of grace than a

thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively."

"When we in darkness walk,
Nor feel the heavenly flame,
Then is the time to trust our God
And stay upon His Name."

CHAPTER XI

ITS ENCOURAGEMENTS

"He never yet put out a dim candle that was lighted at the Sun of Righteousness."—RUTHERFORD.

"So groaned Sir Launcelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man."—TENNYSON.

"'I sink in deep waters,' cried Christian.
'But I see the gate,' said Hopeful, 'and men standing at it ready to receive us.'"—BUNYAN.

THOSE who turn their faces toward the life which in these chapters we have sought to delineate, and endeavour to realise its blessedness, will soon discover that they have matched themselves against a formidable task, essayed a mighty undertaking. They must be prepared to encounter much difficulty and opposition. The way is steep and toilsome. There are many adversaries. Hostile forces are arrayed against us. It may be well, therefore, to take an early opportunity of reckoning up the great consolations and inspirations with which the Christian faith provides us, and on which we may rely in our projected enterprise. The duty is incumbent on us not merely of counting the cost, which is

easily done, but of counting the celestial forces which are ever on our side, and more than counterbalance our human weakness and deficiency. The difficulties of the Christian life are enough indeed to give us solemn pause, but they are no valid excuse for failure, unfruitfulness, or defeat, for greater are they that are with us than all they that can be against us. Our task may be an endless one, but it is no mere labour of Sisyphus. The good fight "foughten well" may be closed right valiantly, and "all the trumpets be sounded for us on the other side," as good John Bunyan has it in his "Pilgrim."

1. It ought to encourage us not a little to remember *the nature of the new life which has been implanted within us.* That life is of such persistent quality that it shall never die away out of the soul. It shall last as long as we ourselves shall last, and that shall be for ever. "I give unto my sheep eternal life" (John x. 28). "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14). "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. i. 23). That holy seed remaineth in us, and thus secures the persistence and preservation of the new nature. The life within may have its seasons

of decline, but it does not decline into apostasy or extinction. It may at times be sickly, but it does not expire. It may have its spells of winter when it lies buried and frostbound, like the principle of vegetation in the month of December, but its substance is in it, and it will revive again. Doomed though it be to be associated with an inborn depravity, and to be thrown into close neighbourhood with the corrupt body of this death which we carry about with us, it shall not be stifled by such hideous companionship. The thought is not for a moment to be tolerated that they who have been quickened together with Christ can ever go back again to the grave of trespasses and sins wherein once they lay, that those for whom the sentence of death has been reversed can ever relapse into their former state of condemnation, or that those who have once been liberated from the dominion of the law of sin and death should ever again return to the house of bondage. What is said of Christ Himself will equally apply to every believer in Christ : "having been raised from the dead he now dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him."

2. Let us bethink us that *the Christian life is the only course of life in which there is no disappointment.* We all know how often in this world we are foiled in our quests, thwarted in our ambitions,

cheated of our hopes, how often the coveted prize eludes our grasp. There is no commoner sight than that of the man who has fallen short of the object on which, legitimately enough, he had set his heart, the man who has been an unsuccessful candidate, whether for intellectual eminence, commercial success, social distinction, civic dignity, or parliamentary honour. But when we enter the region of the Christian life desire does not go without fulfilment, seeking leads on to finding, nor are we ever destined to set our hearts on that which never comes into our hands. Anything is possible rather than that those who strive after peace with God, a clean heart, a right spirit, and a Christian character, should fail in their exertions. Anything is possible rather than that prayers for grace, and goodness, and heavenly-mindedness, should prove abortive. There is no longing so certain to be satisfied as the longing for Christ-likeness. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." "The Promises are absolute as to ultimate success," says John Foster, "to the man who in earnest seeks, and perseveres to seek, the Divine favour—acceptance in Jesus Christ—the sanctification of the soul—eternal salvation." Quite in harmony with this is the

apostolic exhortation: "so run *that ye may obtain.*" Do not the words imply that we who run the Christian race know what the true prize of life is, and run with the certainty that we shall "obtain" what we run for? Not only is the prize real and sufficing, but it shall one day be ours. It shall not turn out to be a phantasm, nor hang for ever dangling in front of us as a perpetual tantalisation. The efforts we put forth and the sacrifices we make to win it shall not be in vain, for we have good grounds for believing that at the end of the course we shall reach the coveted reward. Eventually we shall "obtain" the consecrated will, the purged conscience, the devout affections, the strength and beauty of character, we have pursued through the years. Our lifelong quest shall ultimately find its object, and settle into satisfied fruition. In the old Corinthian games, while many entered the lists, but one received the prize; but in the Christian race the prize is for all who run, down to the least and obscurest competitor. Only a few can win this world's prizes of gold or laurel, but the greatest of all rewards is within the reach of all those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for honour and glory and immortality.

3. Let us encourage ourselves by *falling back on the purpose of God concerning us.* He hath "pre-

destinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. viii. 29). Who can interfere with that predestination, or hinder it from having its effect? If God hath determined that one day we shall be conformed to the image of His Son, who shall disannul His purpose? We cannot conceive of a disappointed or defeated God. If God be for us, who can be against us? Take the case of Israel of old. It was God's will that they should come into the land of Canaan and possess it. A long and arid wilderness may stretch between them and it, but every step of it shall be safely traversed; famine shall not starve them, nor thirst consume them; fiery serpents may sting them, but there shall be a brazen serpent to heal; Jordan may roll in front of them, but its waters shall be divided, and they shall pass over as on dry land. As we have it in Deuteronomy, "He brought them out, that He might bring them in" (Deut. vi. 23). The whole process is embraced within God's Providential plan and purpose—the happy ending as well as the adventurous beginning; the homecoming is ordered by the Lord as surely as the first setting out; our steps are not taken haphazard; we do not live our lives at random. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). If it be our Father's

good pleasure to give the kingdom to us who belong to the flock of Christ, who can deprive us of it? Trials and reverses may come, but what signifies it so long as they do not come between us and the kingdom? If the kingdom is at long and at last to be given us, we need have no fear of being sustained and supported on the way thither; we shall not be lost upon the road. That is a weighty word of the apostle to the Christians at Thessalonica: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. iv. 3). It is God's will that we should be growingly and increasingly sanctified. Shall that will remain for ever unfulfilled? Shall we never get any better than we are, never improve, never become any more free from sin, nor any more fit for heaven? Not unless we belong to the number of those who do not care, who take no trouble, who are content to go on as they are, who think such things as goodness of no necessity. *We* may well *will* our sanctification, and make a serious business of it, seeing that God wills it; and if we do so, God will see to it that we shall not finally fail of the perfection He contemplates for us. And as surely as God sanctifies His people, so in the end He will glorify them. What is the word of the Saviour to those who shall be gathered at His right hand? "Come, ye blessed

of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Observe the kingdom is *prepared* for them, and is it likely they shall be for ever deprived of that which has been prepared for them? Moreover, it is said to be "prepared *for you*"; and shall God prepare a kingdom for those who shall never ultimately get there? Prepared for them "*from the foundation of the world.*" Planned and arranged so long beforehand, and yet those for whom these Divine preparations were all intended allowed to perish by the way! Mansions of bliss in readiness, but never tenanted, because those who were destined to occupy them have not arrived! Nay, there shall be no empty places in Heaven.

> "For *all* the chosen race
> Shall meet around the Throne,
> To bless the conduct of His grace
> And make His glories known."

4. Still further, we may draw encouragement *from the work of Christ and how it avails for us.* Christ is not the author of an atonement that does not atone, or a redemption that does not redeem. If He died to save us, shall the intention of His death be disappointed? Shall so great a ransom be paid in vain? Shall a redemption so costly prove a failure? Shall we be bought with a

price, yet shall He never have us? Such dismal suppositions are Christ-dishonouring and abhorrent. Yet must they all come true, if so be that God's people are not kept unto salvation and brought to their heavenly home in safety. But the work of Christ will avail for them, and the grace of Christ will be ever present with them. If they sin, His grace will pardon them; if they fall, it will raise them; if they go astray, it will restore them; if they droop, it will revive them; if they loiter by the way, it will quicken them. "If there was not such a thing as the grace of Christ," says the saintly Rutherford, "I should long ago have given up all hope of Heaven, and the expectation to see God."

5. It will put new heart and hope into us if we realise that *we are one with Christ.* There is a mutual indwelling of us in Christ, and of Christ in us, a community of spiritual life between us, an interpenetration of our spirit with His. "Abide in me and I in you." We are in Him as the branch is in the tree, as the stone is in the building, as the limb is in the body. He is in us, as a life within our life, vitalising every part. Shall a union so vital ever end in severance or divorce? Paul says, "Christ liveth in me." He prays that "Christ may dwell in our hearts." In stronger language still he declares "we are

members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." If those united to Him may be left to perish miserably in the end, then the body of Christ is for ever a dismembered and mutilated body. It was the Saviour's own word in the Upper Room: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23). If Father and Son take up their abode in the soul of the believer in this ineffable manner, may not such a soul cherish a well grounded expectation of taking up its abode at the end of the days with Father and Son in the House not made with hands?

The thought of our union to Christ ought to be far more present to our consciousness, and far more potent in our experience, and in our lives, than it is. Realised and rested in, it cannot but prove a rich fountain of incentive and encouragement, one of the strongest guarantees of our eternal safety. Union with Christ, be it remembered, is something deeper and more stable than communion with Him. Our communion with Him may at times be clouded and interrupted. But our union with Him is always there, unaffected by passing moods and frames, and always avails. It is the source from which are derived all the endowments

and qualifications for the practice of holiness, and our persuasion that we shall be at last more than conquerors, as Walter Marshall shows very clearly in the third " Direction " of his famous treatise on *Sanctification.* " If we be joined to Christ," says he, " our hearts shall no longer be left under the power of sinful inclinations, but they will be powerfully endowed with a power, bent, and propensity to the practice of holiness." Who can estimate the influences that flow from Christ into the lives of those who are joined to the Lord and are of one spirit with Him, making their moral struggle a victorious one day by day, supporting them in their efforts to make goodness something more than a dream, and urging them on to final triumph and blessedness. There are those who think they have disposed of all such considerations by the cheap and easy comment that this much talked of union with Christ is " mystical." But " mystical " does not mean the same thing as unreal, and if we are to have any religious life at all many elements of mysticism must enter into it. In the words of Dr. Alexander MacLaren, " there is no grasp of the deepest things of religion, and our Christianity is doomed to be a shallow one, unless we have verified in our experience that very ' mysticism ' which the irreligious mind is so ready to dismiss with a sneer."

6. Let us call to mind the inspirations to be derived from the *indwelling of the Spirit.* The unseen Friend and Companion of the soul, He is ever with us and in us, carrying on in silence the work of our continuous sanctification. He it is who perfects our holiness. If cherished and obeyed, He will deliver us from those perilous susceptibilities that still slumber within us, and guard us against those hidden risks which so constantly beset us. In times of discouragement we do well to consider who it is who has taken up His residence within us, and what it is He is pledged to do for us. Shall He desist from His gracious purposes regarding us? Shall He give up His work in our hearts before it is completed? Shall He be defeated in a single soul where He has come to dwell? Shall He begin to sanctify us and not conclude? We are "the temples of the Holy Ghost." Shall He ever forsake the shrine of His own temple, and leave it to be desecrated and defiled? Moreover, by that same Holy Spirit of promise we are "sealed to the day of redemption." What is the meaning of a seal? It gives title, validity, assurance, to whatever it may be affixed to; it affirms proprietorship, it ensures protection. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the putting of God's seal upon the believer, marking him for His own, Heaven's own

signature intimating that he belongs to God, and singling him out for Divine ownership and defence. It is the pledge to the Christian that through all the changes, hazards, and temptations of this mortal life whatever Divine vigilance, foresight, and power can do to help and deliver him will be done. Now shall that seal ever be violated? Shall that Divine signature ever be cancelled or erased? Not for a favoured moment only are we "sealed," but "to the day of redemption"—that is, till the last danger has been survived, and the last enemy has been destroyed, and the last trace of sin's dominion has been obliterated from the soul. Furthermore, the same Holy Spirit of promise is declared to be "the earnest of our inheritance." An "earnest" is a small portion of the estate paid over to the purchaser beforehand as a token that all is his and will come into his hands in due time. It is part of a man's wages given him in advance as a pledge that the full payment will be made later on. It is the first handful of ripe corn as the prophecy and the guarantee of the full harvest to come. It is the bunch of grapes from Eshcol brought to Israel in the wilderness as the first instalment of the full vintage of the Promised Land. Even so the gift of the Holy Spirit is to us the "earnest" of the heavenly inheritance.

The very presence of the Spirit in our hearts, even a small measure of the holiness He works, even a little of the peace, and the comfort, and the joy He imparts, are all to be regarded as prophecies, pledges, foretokens, first instalments of the immortal blessedness and glory laid up for us in the Heavenly Land. An old writer reminds us that a little may serve as an "earnest" as well as much, that a tiny something may be the sure pledge and foretaste of full possession. Now all this has a most evangelical and comforting application. Shall the earnest be given us, but never the full payment? Shall the firstfruits be ours, but shall we never reap the full harvest? Shall we taste the Eshcol grapes, but never "drink the fruit of the vine in our Father's kingdom"? Shall we be put off with first instalments, and find to our everlasting disappointment that there is no more to follow, and never be ushered into our assured inheritance that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for us?

7. Let us *take full advantage of the ordinances of grace.* How they will quicken and invigorate us! The sanctuary will be a great resource to us. Its devotions will stir us, its sacred exercises will nerve and cheer us, its Christian fellowship, and the commingling of voices, will uplift us. How richly will the Sabbath minister to us if we only

dedicate it to the purposes for which it was given us! If we but keep our Sabbath, the Sabbath will go far to keep us. Other days are the days of commonplace; the Sabbath is the great soul-day. Heaven's gate stands open. Blessings are plentiful. Our better nature has a chance to thrive. Religious life is deepened. What a source of refreshment is the Lord's Supper to those who partake of the sacred viands in faith! What a viaticum for the journey is the Saviour's flesh which is meat indeed, and His blood which is drink indeed! Then what a resource we have in Prayer! How it brings into our lives the support of an unseen Hand! What reserve forces it calls in to the aid of the beleaguered soul! And the Word of God—what shining armour it provides for those who fight the good fight of faith, and what weapons it puts into their hands! So God has not left us to struggle on unassisted and unbefriended. With so many helps to help us, we shall not fail of eternal life. With so many lights to light us on our way, we shall not miss the harbour.

8. *Let us lift our eyes from the men and women around us and fix them on that numberless multitude with sins forgiven gathered in immortal convocation before the Throne of God,* to which the elder called the attention of John in Patmos. What and

whence are these who have attained to such dignity and bliss? Once they were tainted with evil, and stained with sin, as we are, but now are they arrayed in the white robes of innocence and purity. Once they were in the thick of the conflict as we are, but their contendings have long since ended in victory. Once they were struggling hard with sins, and doubts, and fears, as we do now, but they have won through. At times they had almost given up all expectation of ever seeing the face of God, yet do they now behold Him in the vision beatific with eyes that shall weep no more. And if they have got to Heaven, why should we despair, whatever adverse influences may compass us about? As Rutherford says, "there be many fair and washen ones before the Throne who were once as black as we are;" and again, "the Lord can hew Heaven out of worse timber than I am." Look up at them in all their bright array, and then remember what they were—men of like passions with ourselves, having no advantage over us by nature, the same tendencies to evil, the same misgivings, the same sinkings of heart. Many of them had committed the very same sins of which we are guilty. Nor was it that they were screened from temptation. On the contrary, not one in all their shining companies was untempted, unassailed,

not one who had not often to cry as earnestly as we do, "Deliver me from evil." Nor was it that they had less trouble than we have, for they "came out of great tribulation." Still less was it that they were favoured with supports which are not given to us. They had nothing to uphold them that we have not. They had God's faithful word to depend upon; and have not we just the same word? They had Providence to rely upon; and have we not the same Providence to aid us? They had the atonement of Christ to expiate their guilt and whiten the soiled robe of their character; and does not the same sacrifice for sin avail equally for us? They had the Spirit to indwell and sanctify them; and does not the same blessed Spirit do His gracious work on us also? Wherefore let us be of good courage. We too may hope to obtain an inheritance, not only among all them that are sanctified, but among all them that are glorified. We too are on our way, and one day shall arrive—life's duty done, and death's cold shadow past.

"Home of the Conquerors! we press
Toward thy seats of happiness:
Through Christ our Lord, we fight, we win,
And thy bright gates shall let us in."

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